VICTORIAN CRITICS AND THE ORIENTATION OF AMERICAN LITERATURE, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE RECEPTION OF WALT WHITMAN AND HENRY JAMES

by

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Are you really of the whole People?
Are you not of some coterie? Some school
or mere religion?

--Walt Whitman

We are the disinherited of art!

--Henry James

PREFACE

In this thesis I have attempted to survey a large, general philosophical problem--the problem of cultural orientation--as it came to expression in the interaction of two vital cultures over a period of more than fifty years.

Perhaps survey is the wrong verb. It implies the impossible, or at least the inadvisable, for so broad a study. I have felt free to select and exclude. To cite a few exclusions, I have left out Tennyson, Browning, James Thomson, and William Archer. I also eliminated, along with scores of minor periodicals and articles, the Fortnightly Review, for example, and the Pall Mall Gazette. The eliminations were not merely arbitrary; I eliminated materials which are of only slight value to the question this thesis explores (Tennyson's friendly correspondence with Whitman, for example) and other materials which could only serve to repeat points already made in the thesis.

One apology to the British reader: I have found it convenient (if not necessary) to conform to American spellings throughout this thesis.

My indebtedness to others ranges far. In two cases its expression comes too late to be received. The late Dr. Henry Zylstra, former Chairman of the Department of English at Calvin College, was the first to arouse my interest in the basic

intellectual and spiritual conflicts inherent in modern literature. The late Professor W. L. Renwick, my original research advisor, was very helpful, especially in the difficult task of limiting and keeping under control the vast research materials to which I had access. As befitted his notion of scholarship, he left me free with the books; he did not try to lead me down a path of his own. I am also indebted to Mr. Hilary Corke and to Dr. A. Melville Clarke for valuable and painstaking criticisms of an earlier draft. I have benefited from the devotion of my wife; I have also benefited from the encouragement of my colleagues on the faculty at the University of Maryland. Finally, I am indebted to the staffs of the following libraries for their efficient help in locating research materials: the National Library of Scotland, the British Museum, the Library of the University of Edinburgh, the Library of Congress, and the Theodore McKeldin Library at the University of Maryland.

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CONTENTS

PART ONE:

American Literature and Western Civilization

CHAPTER ONE

ON ORIENTATION

I.

It is becoming more and more evident that American literature raises important questions about the state of modern culture in general, questions which have almost prophetic bearing on the whole of modern western civilization. The situation is almost paradoxical, for in almost every era of American literature there has been a strong impulse towards isolation, towards separation from the rest of the world. But now the Americans, still shedding the national tradition of isolation and only beginning to shed consciously the national myth of Adamic innocence, turn more often to Europe--only to be often shocked to discover that in many ways they have been a kind of European avant garde all along.

There are good reasons for this strange turn-about. Perhaps the primary one is that American literature, which has always come out of a heated dialogue between two faiths, two parties, what Emerson called the party of memory (oriented towards Europe and the past) and the party of hope (oriented towards the untamed frontier and the future), explores an intellectual crisis which is now as European as it is American. The mind of Europe tends to split itself into the same two halves. Whether this identity of cultural predicament is for Europe "progress" or "decline," "catching up" or, in Mr. T. S. Eliot's phrase, "advancing

progressively backwards," is not now our concern. The simple fact is that the political, social, and cultural developments of the past 250 years have drawn European and American writers closer to the same perspective than they could have been in, say, 1815. In the words of a recent French critic, America has become the Noah's Ark of Europe, just as Europe was once the Noah's Ark of the Byzantine Empire.[1]

Manifestations of this sense of cultural identity are not difficult to find, or to account for. Consider, for example, the fact that American culture in the nineteenth century was a kind of orphan culture; its physical isolation from its European parents gave its literature, in addition to "freedom," a psychological complex of homelessness, loneliness, and spiritual quest. Now, in the twentieth century, the sense of isolation from tradition and the values of the past, the feeling of <u>depaysement</u>, has become a haunting part of the litany in the entire body of the literature of western man. It is perfectly natural that Hawthorne and Melville, who shaped their creative visions under the stress of physical isolation, should now be revered on both sides of the Atlantic by writers who shape their creative visions under the stress of spiritual and intellectual flux. The parent Europe has been pushed along to the same frontiers that her radical, exiled, experimenting children had begun to explore in

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[1]R. L. Bruckburger, <u>Image of America</u> (New York, 1959), p. 5.

America in the eighteenth century. The old parent, with understandable apprehension but with occasional secret hope of finding guidance, turns to look at its big, noisy offspring across the ocean.

But European, and especially English interest in American culture and literature did not wait for the twentieth century. It was always recognized that something important was going on in the American social laboratory. American thought and institutions were, after all, conceived and molded in Europe; the American Revolution itself, as Burke reminded his contemporaries, and as Tennyson reminded his, was fought in the name of English liberty, demanding the guarantees of the English Constitution. The British knew that they were looking at an extension of themselves and that great issues were at stake.

American writers, for their part, were from the start self-conscious about their relationship to European civilization. The drive for a "new literature" began early, usually as a part of the drive for a peculiarly "national literature." The first difficulty was that there was no real <u>natus</u> to express. While some writers (as we shall see) insisted that America could survive culturally only by remaining a part of Europe, others advocated starting from scratch to create an independent, self-sufficient culture. Orientation was the major problem of American culture until at least 1900, and the background to the problem is deep and complex. While Prescott taught that America was a European product, necessarily learning her lessons from

two thousand years of classical and European history, Thoreau sat quietly at Walden Pond, looking westward, defiantly free of the accumulated wrongs of human history; and others of Thoreau's mind grouped themselves about the editorials of the Democratic Review, which gave its opinion in 1839 that "our national birth was the beginning of a new history...which separates us from the past and connects us with the future only."[1] Most of what is great in American literature, Professor R. W. B. Lewis has argued in The American Adam,[2] has come out of the tension between hope and memory, from writers who responded ambivalently to the dialogue, who caught sight of the dramatic complexities and were forced to treat them ironically. Hawthorne, Melville, and Henry James come first to mind. In any case, throughout the history of American literature, the tension between past and future, guilt and innocence, east and west, discipline and freedom is there. But it is there because America was a radical European experiment, an experiment conducted with few laboratory controls, an experiment into which Europe threw the contending ingredients of its own heritage: the classicists, Calvin, Locke, Rousseau, and so forth. In America, these could contend without the weighty control of traditions and institutions.

Obviously, the questions raised in America about the value of the past, the shape of democratic literature, the possibilities

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[1] V, 89.

[2] Chicago, 1955, Ch. I.

of a literature in a mass culture, the innocence or essential evil of man, were also being raised in Victorian England. But American ideology (liberal-democratic) and American mood (isolationist in regard to Europe, and therefore in regard to the past) gave them a peculiar pointedness and urgency, and at times a degree of clarity not found in the abstract discussions of Europe.

This is only to suggest that an investigation of British reactions to the essential problems of American literature in the nineteenth century has more than mere academic interest. As American literature struggled through the century, pulling itself in two different directions, it provided the Victorians with a topic which could have helped them to clarify their thinking about themselves. If the literature of the last half of the nineteenth century is the threshold to modern literature, the present study might serve to sweep a little of the dust from that threshold by revealing writers and critics, both British and American, at work with a set of questions about literature and society which are now patent but which were, at the time, just becoming articulate. The Victorian response to those questions has done much to shape contemporary literature.

First we must take a fuller look at the general problem of the American artist as he tried to relate himself to his materials, to his own world, and (what is not always the same thing) to the world of western civilization.

II

If a single word is needed to express the essential problem of the American writer, the word orientation will serve best. To orient himself, to get his bearings in the world: it is this that he has had to do and must still do. The word may be taken quite literally; it is essentially a matter of direction, of facing east or facing west, facing Europe or the frontier. The word smacks a little of the rhetoric of the over-eager scholar; perhaps, as a summarizing word, it has more of convenience than of accuracy to commend it. But lest it be thought that this is nothing more than a conveniently tidy construction designed to hold together a little system with schools and movements, we do well to pause for a moment and listen to Thoreau. Orientation is clearly a problem for him in spite of his ready solution; in his usual manner he moves it along gently from a particular, physical problem to a general, spiritual and intellectual problem:

> I turn round and round irresolute sometimes for a quarter of an hour, until I decide, for the thousandth time, that I will walk into the southwest or west. Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free.... I believe that the forest which I see in the western horizon stretches uninterruptedly toward the setting sun, and there are no towns or cities in it of enough consequence to disturb me.... ever I am leaving the city more and more and withdrawing into the wilderness.

And he knows, too, that he is talking about America, not just about Thoreau.

> I should not lay so much stress on this fact if I did not believe that this is the prevailing tendency of my

> countrymen. I must walk toward Oregon and not toward Europe.[1]

This question of orientation, of great importance throughout the nineteenth century, was already being raised in the era of Franklin, and already in the literature of that period two streams of American cultural thought can be detected. One of them, which can be represented by the Pope-like couplets of William Cliffton, veils its despair in the thin hope that a saving remnant will preserve culture and stave off barbarism in the American wilderness.

> In these cold shades, beneath the shifting skies,
> Where Fancy sickens, and where Genius dies,
> Where few and feeble are the Muses' strains,
> And no fine frenzy riots in the veins,
> There still are found a few to whom belong
> The fire of virtue and the soul of song.[2]

The other stream, of which Franklin himself must be considered an inconsistent part, and out of which come Thoreau, Whitman, and Sandburg, is strongly optimistic in its assertion that American arts, freed from the traditions of the old world, will not only flourish but will supersede the arts of Europe. Here, for example, is Philip Freneau, writing just after the Revolution:

> Now shall the adventurous muse attempt a theme
> More new, more noble, and more flush of fame
> Than all that went before.

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[1] The Writings of Henry David Thoreau (Boston, 1906), IX, 221-2.

[2] William Cliffton, "To William Gifford, Esq.," in Gifford, The Baviad and the Maeviad (Philadelphia, 1799), p. v.

These streams form the debate which runs through the whole of American literature. Their courses are not straight, and the streams often cross each other; but each stream maintains some kind of identity, and each stream widens and cuts deeper as the nineteenth century progresses. As we shall see in the next chapter, American writers in the nineteenth century were aware of their predicament as Americans and tended either to revel in or to react against their cultural isolation.

Again it must be emphasized that these two streams do in fact exist and can in fact be studied. To interpret American literary history in terms of this dichotomy has its dangers, and these dangers become increasingly apparent in contemporary criticism. There are exceptions and overlappings, and there is the fact that many great pieces of American literature come from neither side of the debate, but from the dramatic and ironic inability of the author to choose between them. Still, the choice, whether it is made or not, is between identifiable minds and traditions. The split character of American literature is evident within single authors (Melville, Cooper, and Hawthorne, for example) as well as in pairs of "opposites" (Whitman and James, Sandburg and Eliot, Wolfe and Katherine Ann Porter). Europeans in particular have difficulty understanding how deep the split is and how crucial the choice is between, say, Whitman and James. In spite of James's own modulated praise of Whitman, with all its

revealing turns,[1] the fact is (or has been) that the high valuation of the one is so incongruous with the high valuation of the other that, as Mr. Philip Rahv[2] points out, "criticism is chronically forced to choose between them--which makes for a break in the literary tradition without parallel in any European country." The only thing remotely comparable is the split between "Europhiles" and Slavophiles in Russian Literature. Those who accept, say, Whitman and Mark Twain as types of the American writer are likely, another critic tells us, "to disparage or even read out of the national literature writers whose sense of America is more complex--for example, T. S. Eliot and Henry James."[3] V. L. Parrington, whose influence on our conception of American culture is regarded by Professor Trilling as unequaled,[4] did in fact read James out of American literature.[5] He also found the

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[1]James's statement, recorded by Edith Wharton in Backward Glance (New York, 1934), p. 186, shivers with hesitancy, irony, and even sarcasm. James mocked Whitman's extravagance and his "too extensive acquaintance with foreign languages," but he liked to read him aloud. His statement that Whitman is the greatest American poet of the century must be judged by our knowledge of what James thought of American poets.

[2]Philip Rahv, Image and Idea (Norfolk, Conn., 1949), p. 3.

[3]F. W. Dupee, The Question of Henry James (New York: Holt, 1945), 21.

[4]Trilling's account of the popularity is interesting. Parrington's Main Currents, he says, is attractive to teachers who suppose themselves to be "opposed to the genteel and the academic and in alliance with the vigorous and the actual." (The Liberal Imagination [New York, 1950], p. 3.)

[5]See below, p. 104.

problem of Poe to lie "quite outside the main current of American thought,"[1] and dismissed Hawthorne as "the extreme and finest expression of the refined alienation from reality that in the end palsied the creative mind of New England."[2] But there is the other side, too. The question to which Henry James devoted his artistic life, counters Professor Leon Edel, is "the very question that at our mid-century has become America's primary concern. The question is quite simply the relation between America and the world."[3]

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[1] V. L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York, 1930), II, 58.

[2] Ibid., II, 450.

[3] Leon Edel, "Introduction," The American Essays of Henry James (New York, 1956), p. xv

CHAPTER TWO

NEW MEN AND LOST MEN IN NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA

The dialogue between two kinds of mind, between two kinds of American experience, between two visions of the American as a social and cultural being is clearly evident in nineteenth century American literature. Some writers speak as new men, men who face the West and the future; others speak entirely as lost men, lonely men, men who face Europe and the past. Most of them speak from both perspectives at once--or otherwise interchangeably. But all of them were seeking orientation.

The bifurcation is obvious and pronounced from 1815 onwards. It can be seen already in the work of Irving and Cooper. Irving, who established his reputation as a writer who could create charming literature out of native American materials, followed his Salmagundi and Knickerbocker's History of New York with three "European" books: The Sketch Book, Bracebridge Hall, and Tales of a Traveller. The concern of these last three books is almost entirely with the old in Europe; their sweetness and persuasive charm convince us that Irving was satisfying a deep hunger for cultural tradition. And the hunger was undoubtedly shared by his American readers; by 1850 they had read through sixteen editions of The Sketch Book, eleven editions of

Bracebridge Hall, and ten editions of Tales of a Traveller.[1] Fenimore Cooper also shifted his perspective. Even in his earlier books, where he is a staunch defender of American republicanism, he stole an occasional glance towards Europe and lamented the restrictions he felt as an American writer:

> There is scarcely an ore which contributes to the wealth of an author that is found here in veins as rich as in Europe. There are no annals for the historian; no follies...for the satirist; no obscure fictions for the writer of romance....[2]

After 1837 (the year of Emerson's famous plea at Harvard for an American literature and the year of the founding of the Democratic Review), the glance towards Europe became a steady longing gaze. Gleanings in Europe (1837) shows a new degree of discomfort and estrangement. In two later books, Homeward Bound and Home as Found, he attacked American vulgarity and expressed his distrust of majority rule. We have to remind ourselves of what our schoolteachers always forgot to tell us about the Leatherstocking Tales: that Natty Bummpo, beautiful child of the forests, died silently and stoically on the edge of the American waste land, having "earned his way" prosaically in the last years as a mere trapper; and that Chingachgook, the noble savage, ended up as Injun John,

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[1]Christof Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James (Dallas, 1958), p. 12.

[2]James Fenimore Cooper, Notions of the American (Boston, 1828), quoted by W. E. Sedgwick, "The Materials for an American Literature: a Critical Problem in the Early Nineteenth Century," Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature, XVII (1935), 142-143.

the village drunk. For Cooper, the American dream, the Adam myth, was dissipated; his association with Europe had complicated the picture of America by magnifying the power of his vision. The simplicity of Cooper's westward orientation had broken down, and his final, total attitude towards east and west was one of ambivalence.

Channing, Emerson, and others were reacting against the wistful yearning for historical depth, complexity, and culture when they launched the campaign for a fresh, vigorous, manly native literature. Emerson's Harvard Divinity School lecture protests the idea of a dependent culture. In its spirit as well as in its cataloguing it seems a clear prophecy of Whitman. "We have yet no genius in America," Emerson said,

> with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw, in the barbarism and materialism of our times...banks and tarriffs, the newspapers and caucus, methodism and unitarianism, are flat and dull to dull people, but rest upon the same foundations of wonder as the town of Troy, and the temple of Delphos, and are as swiftly passing away. Our logrollings, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes and Indians...the wrath of rogues and the pusillanimity of honest men, the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon and Texas, are yet unsung. Yet America is a poem in our eyes...and it will not wait long for metres.[1]

Noah Webster and Edward Everett shared Emerson's hope for new men in a new Paradise. Thoreau, who was regarded by Emerson as the

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[1]Quoted by Holbrook Jackson, Dreamers of Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Nineteenth Century Idealism (New York, 1949), p. 15.

truest American because "his aversion from England and European manners and tastes almost reaches contempt,"[1] was indeed not alone in walking "toward Oregon and not toward Europe." But the dream that inspired so many men to look to the west and to the future--the dream that had begun already in Europe before the first American settlements--had to be made real. In Walden, Thoreau performed the ritual of rebirth which is a necessary preface to the new man as Whitman saw him in Leaves of Grass.

That Emerson was confused by the work of Hawthorne is not difficult to understand. For Hawthorne was caught in the web of the dialogue and could only break out of it and use his creative energies by weaving back and forth, from one side to the other, drawing from each and treating each with twists and knots of irony. He was for some time a Salem recluse; but he was also for seven years a resident of Europe, torn by wavering feelings of attraction and revulsion. He tried hard to hold to the vision of the new society, the American Paradise, but yet he was always held entranced by the feeling of the past. Witness "Doctor Grimshawe." Still better, look at his story "Earth's Holocaust." The story opens with a cosmic bonfire on a western prairie. As the crowd's enthusiasm mounts, all the symbols of royalty and aristocracy are thrown to the flames, and finally the whole body of European literature and philosophy. "Now," says the chief

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[1]Quoted by Holbrook Jackson, Dreamers of Dreams, p. 30.

celebrant, "we shall get rid of the weight of dead men's thoughts." The passage brings to mind something from Hawthorne's English Notebooks: "I wish that the whole Past might be swept away, and each generation compelled to bury and destroy whatever it had produced."[1] This is a real part of Hawthorne, and of American thought; it is the impulse that pumped through Emerson and Whitman. But the story does not end there; Hawthorne's ambivalence moves him to an ironic ending. The reader is made to realize with a faint terror that the true source of oppression--the human heart--remains.

> The heart, the heart,--there was the little yet boundless sphere wherein existed the little wrong of which the crime and misery of this outward world were merely types.[2]

Like many writers of his own generation and Whitman in the next, Hawthorne was eager to bury the past. But like his later admirer, Henry James, he needed the past. He registered the need in his curiously titled Our Old Home and in his final novel, that sensitive account of an American in Italy, The Marble Faun. In his introduction to The Marble Faun he spoke regretfully of the absence of historical depth and its by-product, social complexity, in America.

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[1]Nathaniel Hawthorne, English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart (New York, 1941), p. 243.

[2]Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Earth's Holocaust," in Selected Tales and Sketches (New York, 1951), p. 372.

> No author...can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity.... Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wallflowers need ruins to make them grow.[1]

The book itself has the same message. Again the richness of the past and its closeness yield a vitalizing complexity--because they suggest to Hawthorne the transitoriness of earthly things.[2] In Rome, he tells us, he feels

> a vague sense of ponderous rememberances; a perception of such weight and density of a by-gone life...that the present moment is pressed down or crowded out, and our individual affairs and interests are but half as real here as elsewhere.[3]

The case of Melville is too complicated; one cannot insult it with a few pages of a background chapter. But we should notice in passing his escape from American society into primitive naturalism in Typee and Omoo; his attack on institutions and conventions and complacency in Pierre, a strongly anti-democratic book which paints a tragic picture of the loneliness of the rare individual prophet as he leaves the mob behind; his preoccupation with the Promethean struggle of rough men on the lonely, indefinite sea; his forty years of bitter silence, broken at last with the creation of Billy Budd, the "New Adam," who dies in compassionate sacrifice on a cross of universal human guilt; his pained and

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[1]Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Marble Faun (Boston, 1888), p. 15.

[2]Ibid., p. 179, pp. 225-226.

[3]Ibid., p. 20.

restless comment, "I feel I am an exile here."[1] Melville too was ill at ease with the American dream. With "Vesuvius for an ink-stand," he shaped his creative vision out of his own feeling of landlessness. He shares with Hawthorne the problem that Marius Bewley, in The Complex Fate, calls

> the largest problem that confronted the American artist in the nineteenth century, and which still occupies him: the nature of his separateness, and the nature of his connection with European, and particularly with English, culture.[2]

The list of American exiles and expatriates preceding James is also impressively indicative of confusion and lack of orientation. On it are found the names of Irving, Hawthorne, and Longfellow. There is the interesting young scholar (later Harvard professor) George Ticknor, who set out in 1815 with letters from Jefferson and Madison to converse with the great men of Europe--as "a mere means of preparing myself for greater usefulness and happiness after I return,--as a great sacrifice of the present to the future."[3] There are other scholars: Joseph Green Cogswell and George Bancroft; Motley and Prescott (who became historians, respectively, of Holland and Spain). Lowell, after 1851, pretty well deserted Emerson's party of Hope and

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[1]Quoted by Matthew Josephson, The Artist as American (New York, 1930), p. 1.

[2]Marius Bewley, The Complex Fate (London, 1952), pp. 2-3.

[3]George Ticknor, Life, Journals and Letters (Boston, 1877), p. 24.

soaked himself in European tradition.[1] American artists in Europe included Benjamin West, Washington Allston, William Page, William Wetmore Story (the subject of a biography by James), George Inness, James McNeil Whistler, John La Farge, and John Singer Sargent. Oliver Wendell Holmes, returning from Europe in 1886, complained that "the New World keeps the imagination on a plain and scanty diet, compared to the rich traditional and historical food which furnishes the banquets of the old world."[2]

Even Mark Twain, that most "American" of prose writers in the nineteenth century, who ridiculed the past and Europe in Connecticut Yankee and Innocents Abroad and who said that he would rather be consigned to the Puritan Heaven than be made to read James's The Bostonians,[3] was not always happy with the native westward orientation. Huck Finn's world was a world that was losing its innocence; Hadleyburg was disgustingly corruptible. Twain wrote from London in 1872, "I would a good deal rather live here."[4] In Life on the Mississippi he defended the criticisms of America made by Basil Hall, Dickens, and Harriet Martineau.

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[1] Cf. R. W. B. Lewis, American Adam, pp. 189-191.

[2] Oliver Wendell Holmes, One Hundred Days in Europe (Boston and New York, 1888), p. 200.

[3] Quoted in F. W. Dupee, The Question of Henry James (New York, 1945), p. 161.

[4] Albert Bigelow Paine, Mark Twain: A Biography (New York, 1912), II, 470.

After Matthew Arnold's reflections on America, Twain became Anglophobic again.[1] But he knew and felt the pressure of both sides of the dialogue, and his attitude shows some degree of ambivalence.

Despite all this unrest, the tradition of a distinctive American literature was growing. The journalists--far more influential than Hawthorne and Melville--hailed the frontier humorists and the regionalists and clamored for more. The kind of spread-eagle editorials on literature that Whitman wrote for the Brooklyn Eagle in the 1840's were not at all an unusual kind. Emerson was a prophet with a large following.

But if cultural orientation were not enough of a problem in itself, the American writer in the nineteenth century could wrestle with the related problem of finding a way to address his democratic audience. American society was essentially classless, but definitely middle class in taste. In America, as in Britain, art and culture were nowhere near the middle class center of life. In Britain the penny press and middle class culture in the 1830's helped catapult to fame and success such glib imitators of Southey as Robert Montgomery and Letitia E. Landon while Keats, Shelley, and the young Tennyson were being ignored.[2] In America,

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[1]Twain's wavering attitude towards England is the subject of a thesis by Howard G. Baetzhold, lodged in the library of the University of Wisconsin. See Summaries of Dissertations in the University of Wisconsin (Madison, 1951), pp. 595-597.

[2]John P. Cooke and Lionel Stevenson, English Literature of the Victorian Period (New York, 1949), p. 110.

according to the Literary History of the United States, the popular poems between 1845 and 1885 were Thomas Dunn English's "Ben Bolt," Longfellow's "Hiawatha," William Allen Butler's "Nothing to Wear," Bret Harte's "Plain Language from Truthful Jones," and Ella Wheeler Wilcox's Poems of Passion, while the field of fiction was dominated by Timothy Arthur Shay's Ten Nights in a Bar-room and What I Saw There, the sixty-odd romances by E.N.E.N. Southworth, Uncle Tom's Cabin, and the works of Fanny Fern, E. P. Roe, and Augusta Jane Evans.[1] The demand for communication between writer and reading public was a particularly intense demand in America. This was simply the consequence of living in "the New World," where a minority "class" of readers had never really existed. Irving was already conscious of the demand, and his concern with reaching the masses was regarded by Hazlitt as the main point of difference between Irving and Lamb.[2] This demand that literature be geared to the responses of the "democratic average" was an important part of the movement for American literary nationalism. Whitman spoke at great length about it. But it modified literature in two ways, not one: while it held some writers to the level of the ordinary, it cut others further adrift.

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[1]Robert E. Spiller, et al., eds., Literary History of the United States (New York, 1949), III, 218-221.

[2]William Hazlitt, Complete Works, ed. P. P. Howe (London, 1930), XI, p. 178.

Through all the glitter and the oratory of post-Civil War America and right down into the Brown Age, the Gilded Age, the age that a disenchanted Henry Adams called an age of "men and women as monstrous as the brown houses they live in," the confusion of new men and lost men is obvious. The growing force of the realistic movement gave some power to the nationalist literary tradition--but it also made the writers see the real America instead of the old romantic dream of America. To many of them, America's "fresh start" in the world had already gone sour in the East and the Midwest; for many of them, the frontier was a second chance, a last chance. Even Whitman caught some of the gloom and reflected it in his Democratic Vistas. The writers who belonged to the other side of the dialogue, on the other hand, felt more and more isolated, more and more lonely, more and more in need of depth and traditions and roots. Consider the pathetic remoteness of John La Farge, studying in Europe and returning to Boston to make stained glass windows for an age to be characterized by steam engines and skyscrapers. Artists of such temperament inevitably tended either to take on a missionary complex (as did Story, and to some extent James) or to retreat more and more from the actual world. Emily Dickinson is an interesting reflection of the age. Fearing that the people about her lived without thought and reflection (as indeed most of them did), she retreated into her own trance world to "eat evanescence slowly" with the hills, the sunsets, and a dog as large as herself for companions. Her gift could not have survived her world.

Much of the energy of a century's writers was spent, consciously or unconsciously, creatively or discursively, attempting to achieve orientation and to relate literature to the center of American experience.

CHAPTER THREE

EAST AND WEST, PALEFACE AND REDSKIN

There are some issues in the wake of this cultural tension which deserve elaboration. For by implication the problem comes to mean much more than just looking and bearing east or west. East and west have come to stand for something definite in the American mind, each locus having its list of associations. East, for example, connotes to many the historical past; West speaks of the vigorous present or of the future. The force of this connotation is part of the thesis of Fredrick W. Turner's influential The Frontier in American History; it is the spirit underlying the apocryphal Horace Greely advice, "Go West, young man, go West"; in fact, it is the geist--some might say ghost--of the yet-to-be-written but always heralded "great American Epic." To cite one line from a thousand, here is Archibald MacLeish:

> East were the
> Dead kings and the remembered sepulchres:
> West was the grass.[1]

Note that in the quotations from both MacLeish and Thoreau the westward movement is associated with the rejection of urban civilization. There is strong romantic flavor to this, and also to the "Westerner's" advocacy of nature over culture, freedom over

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[1]Archibald MacLeish, "America was Promises," in Collected Poems, 1917-1952 (Boston, 1952), p. 333.

discipline, nationalism over cosmopolitanism. Professor Ferner Nuhn, a contemporary advocate of the western stream whose The Wind Blew from the East is one of several full length studies of the cultural dichotomy, gives us this list of associations for the words East and West:

> West for work and money, back East for ease and grace. West for profanity, East for piety. West for action, East for status. West for function, East for ornament. West for democratic color, East for aristocratic form.[1]

And Professor Trilling, using Whitman and James as representatives, attempts to summarize the philosophical difference as "the difference between the moral mind, with its awareness of tragedy, irony, and multitudinous distinctions, and the transcendental mind, with its passionate sense of the oneness of multiplicity."[2]

There are other pairs of opposites which express the same antithesis: it is not just west versus east, but nature versus culture, democratic thought versus aristocratic thought, indigenous culture versus derivative culture, lowbrow versus highbrow, the "divine average" versus the unique, and so forth. Mr. Philip Rahv, in his Image and Idea, has given these two "traditions" in America names which have some currency: Redskin and Paleface. Because the interplay between these ideas has become as real and as important in other literatures as it is in American literature, the restrictiveness of Mr. Rahv's terms may be misleading. Still,

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[1]Ferner Nuhn, The Wind Blew from the East (New York, 1942), p. 14.

[2]Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination, p. 11.

the cultural problem which underlies this dissertation might be made clearer if we descend to the merely expedient, bundle all the little tensions of American culture into two handy opposites, and put Mr. Rahv's terms to work for a few pages.

It must be understood at the outset that these forces are not "schools." They are "movements" only in a vague sense. There are very few writers who adopt all of the characteristics of one or the other "movement." (The problem is familiar: Keats and Byron, for example, are in very different ways "classical" as well as "romantic.") However, if we can conceive for the moment of a "pure Paleface" and a "pure Redskin" in contemporary literature, the portraits should serve to illustrate something of the problem of orientation.

The pure Redskin would pay a great deal in tribute to Walt Whitman and insist that modern American literature must follow out the course upon which Whitman set it. The Paleface, on the other hand, would find his master in Henry James. Paradoxically, the Redskin is more likely to be a prose writer and the Paleface a poet. Katherine Anne Porter is one of the few major American prose writers who can be called a follower of James, though Europe has many, among them Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf. The Paleface poet can look back upon Poe and Emily Dickinson, but James is the real point of focus. The Redskin novelist can supplement Whitman with his own image of Mark Twain and with the early naturalistic realists.

The pure Redskin would tend to find American life entirely

sufficient for art; he would advocate and practice a popular art embodying native elements, and fight off any hint or trace of "formalism," literary exclusiveness, and so forth. The pure Paleface would have a conscious concern with form (occasionally, in his criticism especially, making a fetish of it); he would feel restricted, limited, hemmed in by American culture; running against the convention of melting everything into one mass, he would seek to express nuances, gradations, fine shades, distinctions. The Redskin would accuse the Paleface of lacking "faith," of being "altogether defeated by life"[1]--though he now has his own (essentially Redskin) Beat Generation to reckon with. The Paleface would insist that "the best art of our time is not representative; it embodies the triumph of the dedicated artist over the shortcomings of a culture."[2]

The Redskin promotes a universal democratic literature, feeding on the frontier spirit and the teeming materials of American life; the Paleface feels driven--not ideally, but necessarily for the present--to "the fragmentary world of the isolated intellectual."[3] The pure Redskin would accuse the Paleface of ignoring the social relevance of literature and the social

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[1]Philip Henderson, The Poet and Society (London, 1939), p. 182. Cf. also Van Wyck Brooks, The Confident Years.

[2]Fishman, op. cit., p. 45.

[3]Sydney Musgrove, T. S. Eliot and Walt Whitman (Wellington, N. Z., 1952), p. 18.

responsibilities of the writer (again, the Beat writers, who are an extreme, blur the distinction); the pure Paleface, on the other hand, would accuse the Redskin of sacrificing literary quality on the altar of social utility.

Neither "side" can win, for neither side, forced to the extreme of its position, can avoid bringing about the extinction of art, the Redskins killing it by default and the Palefaces by excessive devotion. But neither side exists as a recognizable whole in any case. These are forces, sides of a debate; they are not schools. Yet they are parts of a dialogue which directly or indirectly determine the shape and texture and character of modern American, and to some extent modern world, literature.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISORIENTATION IN TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

Perhaps the whole problem of the orientation of the American writer can be emphasized if we get ahead of ourselves for a moment and look at the literature which followed, came out of, and in some cases continued the nineteenth century debate.

There is a sense in which contemporary American literature has become a mature, established literature. American writers have now gained the attention of European reviewers and readers. Some of this attention, of course, is spurious or misplaced. Much of it is paid to something other than literary merit. One critic suggests that the influence of Steinbeck and Hemingway and Faulkner in Europe rests upon their singular preoccupation with violence, cruelty, the war against environment, and the theme of disintegration.[1] Undoubtedly there is some truth in this contention. But it can be balanced with the observation that American writers, by force of creative achievement, have directly influenced, stimulated, and won the respect of European writers. Andre Molitor, in 1945, was speaking this way about Faulkner, Steinbeck, and Caldwell:

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[1] Solomon Fishman, The Disinherited of Art (Los Angeles, 1953), p. 2.

> ....These men astonish us. Strong, upsetting novels written in a new manner, considering American life in a new way. We decided that certain American writers had reached the age of reflection and were recognizing a profound spiritual and moral crisis. This crisis they were expressing with an unequaled brutality, rawness, and vigor.[1]

And Gide, too, sees the value and the advantage of the American writers' limitations. Like Whitman, but also in a sense like James, he sees the Americans at the vanguard precisely because they have little past and little tradition:

> These new American authors are all, like children, drawn by the present instant, by the now, far from books, exempt from the ratiocinations, from the preoccupations, from the remorse which dull our old world; and that is why going to them can be for us very profitable, for us who can be weighed down by too rich a past.[2]

Still, accepting the prominence and the worth of contemporary American literature, does not something seem wrong? American writers have achieved, with artistic force and power, considerable insight into the "spiritual crisis." Indeed, the crisis is forced and intensified by the absence of direction in American culture. There are few roots; there is little orientation. So the literature becomes daring and experimental (note the almost desperate feeling behind the innovations of Ezra Pound, Hemingway, Tom Wolfe, Allen Ginsberg)--but it also becomes an essentially negative literature, a literature of protest.

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[1]Thelma M. Smith and Ward L. Miner, Transatlantic Migration (Durham, N.C., 1955), p. 18.

[2]Ibid., p. 22.

Of course, the nationalist tradition of indigenous literature goes on. Occasional writers in the twentieth century still keep intact Whitman's vision of a new man in a new culture. The critical position appropriate to Whitman is strongly present in the many disciples of Parrington, for example, who is praised by Stanley Edgar Hyman for creating "the first rounded progressive-democratic-social tradition for American writers to match the reactionary-aristocratic-religious tradition of Eliot, Ransom, Winters, et al."[1] But except among the critics much of Whitman's simplicity and optimistic faith have disappeared. It is no longer current as a creative vision. The writers who limit themselves to Whitman's Law for American themes and materials find plenty to write about, but little to celebrate. Much of his exuberance and his passion for the new, free individual has run aground in America; ironically, Whitman too was sowing the seeds of expatriatism. Witness Henry Miller, expatriate, who worships Whitman at every turn, but prefers France to America because "one likes to piss in sunlight, among human beings who watch and smile down at you."[2]

Of greater interest in contemporary American literature is the confusion and disorientation among writers who fail to hold on

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[1]Stanley Edgar Hyman, The Armed Vision (New York, 1948), p. 95.

[2]The Henry Miller Reader, edited by Laurence Durell (Norfolk, Conn., 1959), p. 21.

to Whitman's (and for that matter Emerson's and Thoreau's) transcendentalist vision of a new society, a society marked by its separateness and its innocence.

In the early 1900's Garland and Frank Norris and the Muckrakers stayed close to American life but repudiated most of what they found. Ever since, from a variety of causes, disenchantment has increased. Trumbull Stickney, who with William Vaughan Moody and George Cabot Lodge form the interesting transitional group known as "the Harvard poets," is far too interesting to ignore. Stickney, an instructor in Greek at Harvard, was cut off by an early death; but his slender volumes of poems deserve more attention than they get, not only for their experimentation with imagism but also for their vision. In the early stanzas of Prometheus Pyrphoros (1900)[1] we can sense the pessimism, along with its indebtedness to Henry Adams's thermodynamic approach to history.

> How dark it is, how dark and miserable! ...
>
> Here we lie
> All hedged in with hoar and darkness, old
> For staring on the sodden vacancy....

Prometheus is far afield from Emerson's "party of Hope" or Whitman's "athletic American themes":

> Sometimes down my dark bewildered brain
> Stumble fantastic hopes that--like the birds
> I've found afield dismembered and undone,
> Like beasts that shut their swimming eyes, and leaves
> That eddy dizzily down the nervous wind--

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[1] Poems of Trumbull Stickney (Boston, 1905), pp. 22-25.

So may we fail and fall, be swept away
From what we are.

In this poem of Stickney's the despair fades; Prometheus re-steals the light, bringing "such dawn as ne'er before tore the wide sky." But man does not simply start in freedom and innocence, as in Whitman, and he must pay a price. Stickney has Prometheus go to

hang out in anguish crucified
Upon the giddy ramparts of the world.

And if Prometheus can call upon man to will the future, he is not very convincing. Stickney's faith in progress is a fainter, weaker faith than we usually find in nineteenth century America. It is significant that Stickney finally went to oriental thought for succor, as had Lafcadio Hearne before him.

Stickney and Lodge are, indeed, transitional. It requires no great straining to see them as precursors of Pound, Hulme, and Eliot. The same disquiet can be seen in the work of Edwin Arlington Robinson, a better-known poet of the same generation. Robinson simultaneously hated the dependence of American culture upon European culture and found little hope for American culture. He finally won through to a conviction of the maturity of America in "White Lights"--but for him, significantly, the great figures in American literature were Hawthorne and James.

By the 1920's alienation and disenchantment were in full bloom. The war had something to do with it, surely, but the mood was coming anyway. In 1913, a year before the war, Ambrose Bierce, silent for twenty years, disappeared across the Mexican border with a horse and a revolver, explaining by letter to a

friend just as a Hemingway hero might explain, "It is better than dying in bed, or falling down the cellar stairs."[1] Bierce's two young disciples, who, he thought, were to be his real gift to posterity, both learned their lessons too well from the master; with unrelieved Biercean irony, they both committed suicide in the early twenties. Emerson's vision of free-singing democratic bards was interrupted by a nightmare: the writers of the Lost Generation, living in exile in Europe: Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, T. S. Eliot, E. E. Cummings, Henry Miller, Eliot Paul, Harold Stearns, Kay Boyle. If most of the writers stayed at home, many of them did not feel at home: Witness F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eugene O'Neill, Ring Lardner, H. L. Mencken, Katherine Anne Porter; Thomas Wolfe's early work also falls into the hostile mood of this period. There were more poets like Robinson Jeffers, repudiating, than there were poets like Sandburg and MacLeish, affirming. Even Robert Frost's first books--undoubtedly his best books--were written and published in exile. Revolt was the order of the day. Mr. Pound's Patria Mia may exaggerate the case of the writer against American civilization, but the feeling, in some form, was generally there; we cannot always dismiss it so easily as Mr. Pound's critics have dismissed him. Something was wrong, something intrinsic in American culture; for, as Pound observed, when something is wrong

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[1]Quoted by Matthew Josephson, Portrait of the Artist as an American (New York, 1930), p. 180.

with the arts, it is wrong with more than the arts. The main literary weight in the twenties, one commentator summarizes, was in the direction of "dislocation and impasse, as though the soul of the American writer was moving one way and the soul of the country another."[1]

In the thirties and forties some writers began returning from exile. Thomas Wolfe and Scott Fitzgerald made their unsteady peace with America before dying, and others returned--though Stein, Miller, Pound, Eliot, and Hemingway did not. Harte Crane, the best of Whitman's avowed disciples, caught the old feeling of hope and expansiveness in The Bridge (1930), but leaped to his death three years later. James T. Farrell, Faulkner, Arthur Miller, and Carson McCullers emerged, stayed at home, and turned their probing lights on American society. But something was still wrong. The feeling of being lost and alienated did not disappear, nor has it during or after the war.

The critics, too, have been sensitive to the alienation and the lack of orientation in twentieth century American literature. T. K. Whipple, in his Spokesmen (1928), had this to say about Dreiser:

> He has suffered from the absence of an established national literary tradition, with its attendant discipline in taste and critical standards.[2]

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[1]Leo Gurko, Heroes, Highbrows, and the Popular Mind (Indianapolis, 1953), p. 78.

[2]T. K. Whipple, Spokesmen (New York, 1928), p. 90.

And here is Whipple, in the same vein, on Eugene O'Neill:

> If O'Neill's dramatic world is narrow and meager, his characterization incomplete, if his imagination is not hale and robust, it is because that imagination, feeding upon a devitalized life inimical to human values, has suffered from undernourishment.[1]

While Parrington was protesting the devitalization of American purity by European orientation, Babbitt and More were pointing out the deficiencies of an indigenous American culture. They were echoed by Norman Foerster's Humanism and America:

> It is doubtful whether a real American culture could ever spring from our own experience; it is certain that it could be caused to spring from our own experience by a happy use of foreign culture.[2]

The same approach is taken by Mortimer Adler and Robert Maynard Hutchins; their "Great Books" program is a manifestation of it.

The critics and writers of twentieth century America still live in a society which (as Tocqueville predicted of it in the 1830's) is in many ways hostile to the arts. Popular American media reflect the hostility daily: look at Jiggs and Maggie or at Moon Mullins on the comic page of the daily papers and you see the manly pride in flaunting civilization. Huntington Cairns could complain in 1948 that "we are confronted with the apparent fact that not a single composer is able to subsist by his serious work."[3] The artist is pushed aside with the intellectual, the

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[1]Whipple, Spokesmen, p. 250.

[2]Quoted by Daniel Boorstin, America and the Image of Europe (New York, 1960), p. 30.

[3]Quoted by Gurko, op. cit., p. 80.

intellectual celebrated in a snatch of song from the film On the Avenue (something that haunts the jangled memory and is unworthy of a footnote):

> He attracted some attention
> When he found the fourth dimension.
> But he ain't got rhythm,
> No one's with him,
> He's the loneliest man in town.

Some of this hostility is clearly the by-product of democracy, and can be found in varying degrees throughout the Western world.[1] But some of it is also distinctly American--it shows up in the satires and parodies that Europeans write of Americans--and is the by-product of the party of Hope, the Redskin tradition, the distinctive half of the debate about American culture. It sends many artists, especially those who protest the limitations and reject the vision of a "distinctively American art," into eccentricity, or into exile, or into tedious public defense of themselves.

For many of them no longer feel or have never felt that America is separate and distinctive. Many of them feel that this phase of American culture, like the same phase of American political thought, has passed. Professor Boorstin, in his most

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[1] Cf., for example, Eric Bentley: "Has the artist been at home under democracy? ...One should think not only of the celebrated critics of democracy, Carlyle, Nietzsche, Wagner, Shaw... but of all the homeless aesthetes and Bohemians driven to pessimism or revolt by the nineteenth century system. Name the great writers of our time: Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, James Joyce, Rainer Maria Rilke, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot...." (The Cult of the Superman, p. xvi.)

recent book, states discursively from the historian's point of view what many American writers witness with their work. "Since about 1900," Professor Boorstin writes,

> we have begun to discover that in many unsuspected ways we might be like the world and might be involved with the world. This declining sense of American uniqueness is the great trauma of the American mind in the last half-century. It has stirred our dissatisfaction with ourselves by shattering our traditional self-image. It has deprived us of our orientation toward the world.[1]

So the sense of direction in American culture is still not clear. The debate that runs through the nineteenth century still carries on. A good deal of American literature comes from one side, or the other, or the complex interplay between them. The literature is marked by confusion, uncertainty, and various kinds of alienation. "The greatest fact about our modern American writing," says Alfred Kazin,

> is the writers' absorption in every last detail of their American world together with their deep and subtle alienation from it. There is a terrible estrangement in this writing....[2]

The spread-eagle critic bent on claiming the maturity of American literature (on the basis of its distinctiveness, of course) must do a great deal of scurrying about, keeping the rattling skeletons concealed in their literary closets. Meanwhile, the old questions about the past, Europe, democratic art, human guilt or human

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[1] America and the Image of Europe, p. 121.

[2] Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (New York, 1942), p. 16.

innocence, become more important to an understanding of contemporary Western literature.

We must go back to the nineteenth century and see the problem in detail.

PART TWO:

British Estimates Before 1856:
The Prospects for an American Literature

CHAPTER FIVE

GENERAL VIEWS OF AMERICAN CULTURE, 1790-1840

Almost without exception, American writers in the nineteenth century were aware of the difficulties and the awkwardness involved in being American writers. But these difficulties were discussed much more bluntly by British observers and writers. The discussion centered about mass standards for the writer and the dull, rootless newness of American life, but it also took into account commercialism, the materialistic temper of American society, and the American attitude towards the past and towards Europe--topics which became explosively relevant in the era of Whitman and James.

I.

In reading the early British commentaries on American culture it is necessary to separate the wheat of intelligent criticism from the chaff of political bombast, vain self-indulgence, investment speculation, and tourist haughtiness. The bulk of the reading has to be in "travel books," for which there was a ready market of hungrily curious readers. Probably no one has taken the trouble to total up the number of such books, but the Edinburgh Review published reviews of forty-four of them before 1860. This fact, coupled with the fact of the popularity of these books, should be enough to discourage the most painstaking

scholar. But these books have been studied by Alan Nevins, William B. Cairns, Jane Mesick, Clarence Gohdes, J. G. Brooks, Paul M. Wheeler, Robert Heilman, and probably a score of doctoral candidates. Still, they are disappointing books.

In some cases the books merely further perpetrated an ignorance about America which was already rampant. By contrast to these travelers' accounts, Goldsmith's wildly exaggerated account of the tropical climate and Campbell's mention of tropical flowers in Wyoming[1] are minor misunderstandings. In other cases political advantage seems to have been served by distortion of fact. The French commentators De Gasparin and Tocqueville and Beaumont show, by contrast, an unaccountable degree of candor, urbanity, and intelligence. There is undoubtedly some truth to the contention of Henry Tuckerman, an American, who charged in 1864 that there was indeed a good market in England for travel books on the United States, but that publishers preferred and sometimes prescribed books that ridiculed America. An English friend of Tuckerman's was commissioned by a London publisher to write a book; "the argument of the book was to demonstrate the inevitable depreciation of mind, manners, and enjoyment under the influence of democratic institutions."[2] However this may be, a few of the books are worth mentioning.

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[1]Cited, along with other misunderstandings, by Henry T. Tuckerman, America and her Commentators (New York, 1864), pp. 273-4.

[2]Ibid., p. 260.

Before steam navigation (1825), most travelers--Henry Fearon, William Cobbett, Francis Hall, Henry Wansey, and Isaac Weld are the most reliable--were middle class businessmen who had come from an England burdened with war debts. Their mission was utilitarian; their observations of American culture and literature were either non-existent or merely trite.[1]

English fiction dealing with America and American subjects in the first twenty years of the new republic's life is likewise of little value or relevance.[2]

If steam navigation increased the quantity and variety, it did not noticeably alter the quality of British books on America. From 1825 to 1840, the tourist army was largely Tory in sentiment, its members apparently bent on collecting materials, factual or otherwise, with which to illustrate pre-conceived arguments against the social revolution which was threatening the peace at home.[3] One Reverend Isaac Fidler, a Tory Anglican vicar, was ruffled into writing a book of ridiculous pomposity; Mrs. Trollope and Basil Hall wrote violently, using sweeping generalizations; Captain Marryat, the geologist Lyell, and Captain Thomas Hamilton were less violent--but no more careful. Harriet Martineau's

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[1]Cf. Alan Nevins, American Social History as Recorded by British Travellers (New York, 1931), pp. 10-26.

[2]Robert B. Heilman, America in English Fiction, 1760-1800 (Baton Rouge: Univ. of Louisiana Press, 1937), pp. 423-430.

[3]Nevins, op. cit., pp. 111-138.

three-volume Society in America shows deeper analysis and (incidentally) a favorable disposition: but it does not discuss the possibilities of literature and the arts in America. Dickens, in American Notes and in Martin Chuzzlewit, showed a natural interest in this question. But he was a descriptive writer rather than an analytical writer; his preoccupation with courts and prisons in American Notes and with comic creation in Martin Chuzzlewit left room for only dabs and touches of analysis, none of them outstandingly perceptive. Fairly often, especially in American Notes, he put aside comic caricature and talked seriously about truth and beauty, saying essentially what Poe had said about "the human aspiration for Supernatural Beauty":[1]

> It would be well...for the American people as a whole, if they loved the real less, and the Ideal somewhat more....if there were a wider cultivation of what is beautiful, without being eminently and directly useful.[2]

Such passages, along with the more typical tirades against American journalism and Mark Tapley's shrewd observations of inflated artificiality, might be taken to indicate Dickens's general failure to find hope for an American literature. They must be balanced, however, with less-frequent expressions of hope, as in Dickens's comment on Harvard's leavening influence upon Boston

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[1]Edgar Allen Poe, The Poetic Principle (Paris: Editions du Myrte, 1945), p. 92.

[2]Charles Dickens, American Notes (London: Chapman and Hall, 1895), pp. 196-197.

society, where "the almighty dollar sinks into something comparatively insignificant, amidst a whole pantheon of better gods."[1] It might be noted in passing that such comments on the Ideal, beauty, and Harvard from a writer who is a "slum realist" must have been only confusing to Americans in the nineteenth century. Dickens had no partisan feeling for the dichotomy in American culture.

II.

The writers who stayed in Britain, undistracted by American ice-houses, spittoons, and rocking chairs, caught the essence of the question of American literature more consistently. The very possibility of an American literature was immediately called into question. That no real literature existed up to 1820 seemed perfectly obvious. Blackwood's, in 1819, assured the readers that "if the whole stock of their literature were set on fire tomorrow, no scholar would feel the loss." As to the arts in general, "America is just about where she was when discovered by Columbus."[2] "Who," asked Sydney Smith, "in the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? Or goes to an American play? Or looks at an American picture or statue?"[3] Unfortunately, the ensuing

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[1]Dickens, American Notes, p. 25.

[2]Blackwood's Magazine, IV (Feb., 1819), 546.

[3]Edinburgh Review, XXXIII (Jan., 1820), 79.

discussion was carried on without much reference to actual American books--this because most American literature published in Britain appeared in the form of cheap reprints of the kind never reviewed in the periodicals.[1] But the attitude that there was no American literature and could be no American literature was in strong predominance in most of the periodicals, Tory, Liberal, or Radical, until the middle of the century.

For one thing, the critics of this period thought it significant that America was strictly a mercantile society. She was governed, in Carlyle's phrase, by the Cash-nexus. Her speech, her manners, her values were all molded in part by the standards of commerce. This made life dull, devoid of range and interest. It seemed scarcely possible that great literature could grow out of such barrenness. Literature, the Athenaeum observed, requires the habit of reflection.[2] "We have had poets from the loom and the plow," commented William Roscoe, "but none from the counter."[3] "There is nothing," said Blackwood's, "to awaken fancy in that land of dull realities."[4]

It was generally assumed by these critics that writers needed

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[1]Clarence Gohdes, American Literature in Nineteenth Century England (New York, 1944), pp. 18 ff.

[2]Athenaeum, III (Feb. 11, 1829), 84.

[3]William Roscoe, ed., Specimens of the American Poets (London, 1822), p. 4.

[4]Blackwood's, loc. cit.

an historical past upon which to reflect. But this too was missing in America. There could be but few reminders of past ages. Hazlitt regarded this fact as explanation for his comments on American literature up to 1826. He meant, in other words, that imagination had to feed on history.

> The fault of American literature (when not a mere vapid imitation of ours) was, that it ran too much into dry, minute, literal description....They had no natural imagination....[1]

Another writer found the American difficulty to lie in the fact that "Her poets must be inspired by Hope rather than by Memory, who was held of old to be the Mother of Muses."[2] They have, says another,

> Neither history, nor romance, nor poetry, nor legends, on which to exercise their genius, and kindle their imagination. In truth there is no room amongst them for such men as an Alfred, a Chaucer, a Spencer /sic/, a Bacon, a Newton, or a Locke.... /T/here cannot possibly be such men in America; ...the peculiar circumstances of society, which give charms to our early poets, can never be experienced there....[3]

Such comments were typical. William Roscoe, in an excellently perceptive preface to his 1822 edition of Specimens of the American Poets, saw the relationship of this whole problem to the larger problem of literary tradition--and incidentally defined the question which was to haunt American writers for the

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[1]William Hazlitt, Works, VI, 385.

[2]Blackwood's, XXXI (April, 1832), 646.

[3]The British Critic, X (Nov., 1818), 491.

following eighty years:

> The anomalous situation of America has placed her in a dilemma. She must either read, admire, and imitate our English writers, and thus probably remain for ages without a distinctive and national literature of her own, or she must abandon and abjure those foreign models, and thus run no inconsiderable risk of acquiring a rude and degenerate taste. The latter alternative is...the theory of the Americans, especially of their poets.[1]

Critics also charged America with intellectual immaturity. The limitations of knowledge in America, they argued, were severe enough to make American literature either impossible[2] or totally dependent.[3]

But of much greater importance is the attempt to evaluate American literary potential by reference to the structure of American society. The rigidly partisan journals were, of course, deeply involved in this sort of criticism. The Tory case was stated simply and sharply in the Athenaeum:

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[1]Roscoe, op. cit., p. 5. Roscoe's final sentence is more prophetic than it is empirically accurate. George S. Gordon (Anglo-American Literary Relations, p. 100) sets 1837--the year of Emerson's oration at Harvard on the American Scholar--as the key date in the movement for "liberation" of American letters. The fact that the Democratic Review was founded in the same year for the purpose of developing a distinctively American and democratic literature adds support. (Cf. Stafford, Literary Criticism of "Young America" ..., pp. 56-60). The only noteworthy groundbreaker before 1837 was Channing's article in the Christian Examiner on "The Importance and Means of a National Literature," which appeared in 1830.

[2]Blackwood's, IV (Feb., 1819), 546.

[3]Critical Review (5th series), V (Jan., 1817), 91.

> We do not believe that America has a literature; we do not see that it has the germs of one; we do not believe that it can have one until its institutions are fundamentally changed.[1]

Nine years earlier, the Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany had elaborated the same theme: American institutions are hostile to the development of literature.

> In common, we believe, with many of our countrymen, we did believe that there was something in the constitution of American society unfavourable to the development of literary genius, that the form of their government presented an insuperable barrier to the formation of a standard of taste among themselves....[2]

What is missing, of course, is the discipline and refinement which is born of aristocracy; "the establishment of an aristocracy...(is) indispensable to a national literature." What is also missing is that greatest possession of an aristocracy, leisure. For ages to come, America, "busied in...cultivating her waste lands, would no more think of manufacturing her own literature than her own hardware."[3]

The problem of public taste in a democracy stands out clearly in these early reviews, usually as a further extension of the problem of having no traditional "standards of taste." The comments on America's early "democratic poets" revive something of the flavor: while Bryant, for example, was given the dubious

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[1] Athenaeum, II (Oct., 1829), 637.

[2] Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany, VII (Dec., 1820), 543.

[3] Ibid.

honor of being praised by the Penny Magazine for being "simple and intelligible enough for the common reader,"[1] Longfellow's common simplicity (the source of tremendous popularity in Britain) was subjected to numerous parodies, among them one in Punch which concluded in meager puns, "If you call such ink-Standish stuff poetry, Punch will soon reel you off Miles."[2] Even the liberal London Magazine, in language which Americans could only characterize as Tory, warned of the difficulties ahead for a literature which must grow in the atmosphere of social equality. Americans are headed for trouble because they "do not tolerate the privileges of birth or readily sanction those of genius. A very little excess above the water-mark of mediocrity is with them quite enough."[3] In a similar manner the Edinburgh Review, going slightly beyond the question of popular taste and into the question of free opinion, suggested the problem which Tocqueville, six years later, was to call the problem of "the tyranny of the majority":

> And here we will state a suspicion, into which we have been led by more than one American writer, that the establishment of civil and religious liberty is not quite so favorable to the independent formulation, and free circulation of opinion, as might be expected.[4]

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[1]Penny Magazine, I (June 30, 1832), 134-135.

[2]Walter H. Hamilton, ed., Parodies of the Works of English and American Authors (London: Reeves and Turner, 1884-1889), I, 80.

[3]London Magazine, II (Sept., 1820), 147.

[4]Edinburgh Review, I (Oct., 1829), 125.

Bishop Berkeley had said that the course of empire was moving westward and that "Time's noblest offspring is the last." Shelley, in "The Revolt of Islam," saw America as "an epitaph of glory for the tomb of murdered Europe." There was speculation about a pantisocracy in the American wilderness. But before 1840 there were almost no critics or reviewers who shared the vision of the poets.

CHAPTER SIX

TOCQUEVILLE AND AFTER

The British and the Americans are, as Bernard Shaw observed, hopelessly separated by the barrier of a common language. It was probably inevitable that the first classic work[1] on American society should be done by a Frenchman. Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America gave to European commentary on America the depth and clarity and seriousness and perspective that it had lacked. In spite of the fact that in 21 chapters on American Literature Tocqueville does not name a single author or book, it also contributed much to the discussion of America's literary potential. Even in Britain the book marked a turning point. Hence, although it might appear a digression, we must consider briefly Tocqueville's reflections upon literature in a democratic society. This can best be done by briefly summarizing his position and indicating the contemporaneous British reaction to it.

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[1]Tocqueville's supremacy is generally recognized. The German philosopher Dilthey calls him "undoubtedly the most illustrious of all political analysts since Aristotle and Machiavelli." (Quoted by J. P. Mayer, Prophet of the Mass Age: A Study of Alexis De Tocqueville [London, 1939], p. xiv.) Sir Herbert Read calls Democracy in America "a work of universal significance, ranking to my mind with Plato's Republic and Laws." ("De Tocqueville on Art in America," Adelphi, XXIII [Oct.-Dec., 1946], 9.)

I.

Tocqueville's entire study is organized around what he called "the equality of conditions," "the fundamental fact from which all others seem to be derived."[1] This great principle has much to recommend it; but it also raises many serious problems. The disappearance of the aristocratic class, whatever its advantages, could easily mean the disappearance of superior intellect, for "the greater or the lesser possibility of subsisting without labor is...the necessary boundary of intellectual improvement."[2] The attempt to level all men is contrary to nature, for

> although the capacities of men are widely different, as the creator has doubtless intended they should be, they are submitted to the same method of treatment.[3]

Such a condition is necessarily reflected in literature and in the fine arts. Tocqueville reminded his readers that

> America has hitherto produced very few writers of distinction; she possesses no great historians, and not a single eminent poet. The inhabitants of that country look upon...literary pursuits with disapprobation; and there are towns of very second-rate importance in Europe in which more literary works are annually published than in the twenty-four states of the union put together.[4]

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[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, edited by Henry Steele Commager (London, 1948), p. 1.

[2] Ibid., p. 186.

[3] Ibid., p. 48.

[4] Ibid., pp. 240-241.

He was careful to make clear that America's indifference to art was not a product of democracy and its institutions or of equality merely; there were other causes which had to be kept separate; he did not wish to confuse what was democratic with what was only American. He insisted on isolating such peculiarly American factors as (1) the dominance of commerce over American life; (2) the puritan background, with its hostility to art and literature; (3) the distraction of the mind towards the easy adventure of seeking great potential wealth; and (4) the possibility of relying upon Great Britain to fill the needs of cultural life and the life of the intellect.[1] These factors, having nothing to do with democracy, all tend to turn the attention of America towards things, towards the material world.[2] There is, of course, some overlapping with essentially democratic factors: points (1) and (3), for example, are let loose and intensified in American society by the absence of rigid classes and by the equality of conditions. Tocqueville saw this link between democracy on the one hand and the materialism which derives from commerce on the other. Hence it is no contradiction for him to say, in another part of the book, that "democracy (not Americanism) not only infuses a taste for letters among the trading classes, but introduces a trading spirit into literature."[3]

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[1]Tocqueville, Democracy in America, pp. 156-157, 312-314.

[2]Ibid., p. 314. [3]Ibid., p. 332.

Democracy and its institutions, Tocqueville attempted to show, have a very marked influence upon literature and the fine arts. The intellect must be employed, not to gratify the mind and spirit as in aristocratic ages, but to gratify the body.[1] Democratic nations "will habitually prefer the useful to the beautiful, and they will require that the beautiful should be useful."[2] Art, no longer slanted towards a single class, will have a wider market--but it will also have fewer opulent and fastidious consumers to demand high standards of excellence.[3] Materialism in art is a necessary outcome:

> The social conditions and institutions of democracy impart, moreover, certain peculiar tendencies to all the imitative arts.... They frequently withdraw them from the delineation of the soul to fix them exclusively on that of the body: and they substitute the representation of motion and sensation for that of sentiment and thought: in a word, they put the Real in the place of the Ideal.[4]

This preoccupation with the physical world, Tocqueville thought, hindered and limited the possibilities of poetry. The imagination does not become extinct; but it transfers its attention to the useful and the actual.[5] The principle of equality actually "diminishes the number of objects to be described."[6] Tocqueville found three reasons for this limitation of the poet's material. First of all, the principle of equality aids the breakdown of

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[1]Tocqueville, Democracy in America, p. 318.

[2]Ibid., p. 320. [3]Ibid., p. 324. [4]Ibid., p. 325.

[5]Ibid., p. 341. [6]Ibid., p. 342.

religious discipline. In the scattering of belief, scepticism "draws the imagination of the poets back to earth," or, at best, religious belief is simplified to a belief in one vague Supreme Power, and loses touch with secondary agents. Secondly, democracy and equality create a natural depreciation of the past so that it too must be out of bounds for the poet. Finally, even the present itself is of limited use to the poet: his concern must be with the leveled average, not with the universal or ideal in man.[1]

But it would be misleading if we left the matter here, implying that Tocqueville saw no hope for a literature which rises out of a society based upon the principle of equality. That he was pessimistic--not about democracy, but about democratic art--is a matter of fact; but he saw some different kind of literature emerging, a literature which could penetrate quite deeply into unexplored phenomena.

> The principle of equality does not...destroy all the subjects of poetry: it renders them less numerous, but more vast.[2]

The principle of equality, "in proportion as it has established itself in the world, has dried up most of the old springs of poetry";[3] but there is presumably the chance that new springs will be found.

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[1]Tocqueville, Democracy in America,

[2]Ibid., p. 346. [3]Ibid., p. 342.

The "tyranny of the majority" was also a central theme in Tocqueville's analysis of America's literary soil. He saw the tremendous power of public opinion--"...religion herself holds her sway there, much less as a doctrine of revelation than as a commonly received opinion"[1]--and feared its effect upon literature. It was not merely the distinction between popularity and literary quality, and its effects upon various writers' rewards, that troubled him; he thought the creative process itself was endangered because writers would be forced to conform their opinions to those of the majority. He found that, just because majority rule was worshipped, the expression of unpopular opinion was bitterly resented in America more than anywhere in the world. America, said Tocqueville, has no great writers because "literary genius cannot exist without liberty of thought, and there is no liberty of thought in America."[2]

So much for general analysis. It is more interesting to see Tocqueville go to work as a prophet of the American literature of the future. He complained that there was no real American literature;[3] but he was certain that America would ultimately have a literature of her own, of different and predictable character. It would be an unconventional, perhaps even lawless literature because this is the natural outcome of a society which is

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[1]Tocqueville, Democracy in America, p. 298.

[2]Ibid., p. 195. [3]Ibid., pp. 328-329.

fragmented, atomistic, lacking in community.[1] Literary form will "ordinarily be slighted, sometimes despised."[2] The "more delicate beauties" of literature will be considered to be simply "a transient and necessary recreation amid the serious labours of life."[3]

Literature will, of course, have to conform to the demands of readers. There will be tremendous pressure for books which are quickly read and easily understood, emphasizing the unexpected, interesting enough to break the monotony of practical life, dealing in "rapid emotions, startling passages." The object of writers will be "to astonish rather than to please, and to stir the passions more than to charm the taste."[4] The restriction of the democratic poet to the leveled average, the common, the ordinary will force him to go below the surface of appearance "in order to read the inner soul."[5] Thus Tocqueville predicted--accurately, if one looks only at the main stream of American literature--a literature which is experimental, unconventional, impatient to achieve effect, realistic, and psychological in method.

Because democratic literature will be "naturally deficient" in craftsmanship and in a sense of the ideal, American writers will have to study carefully the literature of the ancients. The

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[1]Tocqueville, Democracy in America, pp. 329-330.

[2]Ibid., p. 331. [3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., [5]Ibid., pp. 345-346.

value of such a study would lie in the fact that classical literature would simply set democratic literature in relief; the peculiar democratic literary qualities will "spring up of their own accord." Interestingly, Tocqueville anticipates the objection of the Whitman school to any contact with classical culture; but he insists that such study may be useful to the literature of a people "without being appropriate to its social and political wants." There is, of course, some small danger that men will "perturb the state, in the name of the Greeks and Romans, instead of enriching it." But this cannot occur so long as literary study is not exclusively limited to the classics.[1]

From one point of view at least, Tocqueville thought that literature, the arts, and scientific activity stood to gain from democracy. The middle classes, accumulating wealth and possessing the freedom to expand wherever they wish, will individually attempt from natural inclination to better the mind and the human spirit. This cultural energy will filter down even further into society, for all men will realize that in a society based upon equality it is mind that makes the difference, and makes wealth and social status possible.[2]

Though summary cannot do such a book justice, it is obvious that Tocqueville, with greater candor than any of his predecessors,

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[1]Tocqueville, Democracy in America, p. 333.

[2]Ibid., pp. 314-316.

caught a glimpse of the real problem of American literature. He was not (as he is sometimes imagined) a mere aristocratic heckler of American literature. He saw both sides of the dialogue that was forming, and in some respects he saw great promise for American literature. At times his French background tempted him into making too easy an identification of the aristocratic with the classical and the democratic with the romantic; but the oversimplification is almost appropriate if we savor again the romantic flavor of the American nationalist ideology.

Charles Cestre[1] is right in noting, as Edward Dowden[2] noted many years earlier, that Tocqueville gave an accurate forecast of Whitman. It is well to remember that he did not do so in consistently disparaging tones, even though he was at the same time exploring the difficulties and deficiencies of a literature cut off from the nourishing sources that had fed the literature of Western civilization for centuries.

II.

Tocqueville's work was welcomed in Britain with unusual enthusiasm, both by readers and by the great reviews. John Stuart Mill, reviewing the second half of the work when it appeared in

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[1]Charles Cestre, "Alexis de Tocqueville, Temoin et juge de la civilization Americaine," Revue des Cours et Conferences, XXXV (Jan. 15, 1934), 281-287.

[2]Edward Dowden, Studies in Literature (London, 1878), 468-521.

1840, spoke of its "easy triumph...over the indifference of our at once busy and indolent public...."[1] Much of this may have been due to Sir Robert Peel's public recommendation of the book, duly printed as advertisement by the publishers,[2] which (as Mill observed) misled many country gentlemen into believing that the book was a definitive demolition of democracy, but which still achieved great good,

> since the result is, that the English public now know and read the first philosophical book ever written on Democracy, as it manifests itself in modern society.[3]

Most of the reviews--Edinburgh, Westminster, Blackwood's, Quarterly, Tait's, British and Foreign, Eclectic, London, and North British among them--gave considerable space to the work; but, because it appeared in one of the stormiest decades in the nineteenth century, the concern is almost exclusively political--and partisan to boot. Valuable as some of these reviews are--Mill's forty-seven pages in the Edinburgh Review and the two long articles in the British and Foreign Review are especially outstanding--they seem to indicate no awareness of the fact that

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[1] Edinburgh Review, LXXII (Oct., 1840), 1.

[2] Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, VII (new series) (Aug., 1840), p. 2: "Let me earnestly advise your perusal of M. de Tocqueville's work; his testimony, as well from actual experience as on account of freedom from prejudice, is above suspicion." Mill (op. cit., p. 2) reports that the Tories immediately made phrases like "the tyranny of the majority" part of their stock, but failed to understand the work as a whole.

[3] Edinburgh Review, op. cit., p. 2.

something of major importance has been contributed to the discussion of American literature.[1] Mill, whom Tocqueville's biographer calls one of the very few men who understood Tocqueville,[2] did find this facet of the book worthy of comment. Mill objected that Tocqueville had not clearly distinguished "democratic" forces from "commercial, middle-class" forces; for Mill it was really the latter which threatened human culture. But, he went on, the rule of the middle classes can be trusted if society strengthens as a counter "an agricultural class, a leisured class, and a learned class."[3] Aside from this, Mill and Tocqueville agree. Democracy per se, wrote Mill, is not fatal to literature; art will flourish in a democratic society; but its quality will decline, and literature will become a trade. "There will thus be an immense mass of third and fourth-rate productions, and very few first-rate."[4]

Blackwood's reviewer, also reviewing the second half of Democracy in America in 1840, registered a very different reaction. He found in Tocqueville only gloomy warnings about the destruction of art, and objected to them. "We entertain no such

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[1]This is due in part to the fact that the two volumes of the work were published separately. The first volume was given most of the attention, but it is in the second volume that Tocqueville deals with American cultural and intellectual life.

[2]J. P. Mayer, op. cit., p. 150.

[3]Edinburgh Review, op. cit., p. 45.

[4]Op. cit., pp. 26-27.

terrible vision of the future as that which haunts M. de Tocqueville.... In all his views it is evident 'fear shakes the pencil, fancy loves excess.'"[1] The reviewer did not think that changes in social structure would bring about changes in poetry.

> Such a change in the character of poetry, as M. de Tocqueville supposes will come about, appears to us quite impossible, unless a correspondent change, not in governments, not in society, but in human nature itself, takes place at the same time.[2]

For the source of inspiration for poetry, the reviewer argued, is simply nature. There are no other sources. The absence of a past in America does not seem to him a problem at all because it is inconceivable to him that man could lose his "natural" fascination for the past. If a society did lose it, they would have not a different poetry, but no poetry at all. The very idea of a body of poetry out of touch with the past seemed to Blackwood's "preposterous."[3]

Although other reviewers and critics had little to say about Tocqueville's observations on America's literary potential, his book became an important factor in British criticism after 1840. Most intelligent critics were compelled to reckon with him, to work in terms of his book. Democracy in America became a pivot, a point of reference, a springboard. It became this for the two major British critics to follow Tocqueville, Lord Bryce and

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[1] Blackwood's Magazine, XLVIII (Oct., 1840), 472.

[2] Ibid., p. 471. [3] Ibid., p. 472.

Matthew Arnold; it also became this, but less directly, for most of their fellow commentators.

III.

After 1840, the ranks of popular travel-books continued to swell and the reviews continued their partisan volleying; but as America grew, survived a war, opened her western territories, and increased her claims to civilization while the continent was seething in revolution and Britain was adapting herself to radical social changes, serious interest in the new world increased. British writers of all political factions began to look more intensely at the progress (or regress) of the great social experiment. America was becoming significant; publishers were selling studies as well as impressions.

Already before the Civil War in America, British social criticism was swinging towards a more favorable view of America--in reaction, Nevins too simply suggests, to the earlier "Tory distortions." After the war and the surprising victory of the forces of union, America received great respect from most people in Britain. Thus analysis gradually displaced partisan horn-blowing as the century moved towards its own conclusion.[1]

American literature, too, was gaining recognition. Little review space was given to American literature because the

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[1]Nevins, op. cit., pp. 283-307, 423-468.

copyright confusion allowed American books to appear in the reprint class. This same fact, however, gave them wide circulation. Throughout the century American books had an increasing popularity; in the final decade of the century the English Catalogue listed ninety editions of Hawthorne, seventy of Holmes, sixty each of Twain and Irving, fifty each of Lowell, Cooper, and Howells.[1] Even Harper's Monthly found a good audience in Britain, hitting a circulation of 24,000 by 1882.[2]

We cannot pause to look at specific reviews of these popular American authors. But the extent of their popularity should be kept in mind. The general critics by this time had access to concrete illustrations of America's literature; they had less excuse for talking in the abstract about the prospects for American literature.

The extent to which the mood had shifted to one of sympathetic interest and hope can be sensed by perusing the general studies of America written by William E. Baxter, Lord Carlisle, Anthony Trollope, Herbert Spencer, and others. James Silk Buckingham, the founder of the Athenaeum, turned out a cumbersome

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[1]Equally surprising figures are indicated by Professor Brander Matthews in his pamphlet on the copyright issue, American Authors and British Piracies (1889). Matthews charged that in 1885 thirty-six titles out of ninety-one in Warne's "Star Series" were American; likewise thirty out of thirty-eight in Ward, Lock, and Tyler's "Home Treasury Library" and sixty out of eighty in the "Beeton's Humorous Books" series.

[2]J. Henry Harper, The House of Harper (New York, 1912), p. 475.

eight-volume study in 1841-1842 which is typical of the period, singing one lengthy chorus of praise punctuated by blasts of radical ideology.

There were many other such books. The best of the early ones was Alexander Mackay's three-volume The Western World (1849), which enjoyed great popularity and reigned supreme among British books on America until Bryce's American Commonwealth appeared in 1888.[1] Mackay was, like Buckingham, an ardent radical with a great enthusiasm for American society. He had no reservations about literature in such a society, and was pleased with the rapid growth of a truly distinctive literature. He appears to have thought this literature (Twain and Whitman had not yet published) well on its way to greatness:

> The American brain is as active as American hands are busy. It has already produced a literature far above mediocrity, a literature which will be greatly extended, diversified, and enriched, as by the greater spread of wealth the classes who can most conveniently devote themselves to its pursuit increase.[2]

By the 1850's, the atmosphere in Britain was relatively clear for a discussion of American literature. If the Civil War in the early sixties confused it, the confusion was temporary. The critical standards and issues and the hopes and fears for American civilization were fairly clear. To all appearances, the British were ready for Whitman and partially ready for James.

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[1] Nevins, op. cit., p. 346.

[2] Ibid., pp. 360-361. This seems an obvious echo of Tocqueville, op. cit., pp. 314-316.

PART III:

Walt Whitman and Henry James:
The Orientation of American Literature

CHAPTER SEVEN

WALT WHITMAN: THE NEW AGE AND THE NEW ART

Although he had his predecessors, Walt Whitman is surely the greatest of the champions of a native, independent, democratic American literature. The time was ripe for him. Emerson, Channing, Thoreau and others had prepared the way. So had the Democratic Review. The standard reference work on American literary history rightly calls his "Preface" to the first edition of Leaves of Grass "a synthesis of all earlier pleas for an American literature."[1] But Whitman came with more than just pleas and theories; he came with a book of unique American poems--a book which he entitled Leaves of Grass, a book which he once referred to anonymously as "that incongruous hash of mud and gold."[2]

He remained a strong advocate of a national literature throughout his life. Beginning already with the first reviews and editorials in the Brooklyn Eagle, his writings show a continuing concern with the new requirements of the New World, the inadequacy of European literary traditions for a socially emancipated people, the dangers of importing old and foreign ideas and

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[1] R. E. Spiller et al., Literary History of the United States (New York, 1948), III, 48.

[2] Collected Poems and Selected Prose, ed. Emory Holloway (London, 1938), p. 604. [This edition will hereafter be referred to as CPSP.]

forms. American society, as Whitman saw it, was a new and different society, a capstone to the European societies of the past, but also a new society starting afresh. His prophetic destiny was to indicate and create a character for the literature that she should produce. "Solitary, singing in the West," Whitman struck up for the New World.

Whitman's New World was not entirely an actual world. It was often only the dream-world of the Adam-myth that runs through American thought and literature. It was a world that Whitman felt compelled to help shape; it was, as R.W.B. Lewis says, "only one phase of the story imbedded in the American response to life."[1] Leslie Fiedler has said it better than anyone: Whitman, he tells us, was

> condemned to play the Lusty Innocent, the Noble Savage, by a literary tradition that had invented his country before he inhabited it....The whole Western world demanded of him the lie in which we have been catching him out, the image of America in which we no longer believe; the whole world cried to him, "Be the bard we can only dream! Chant the freedom we have imagined as if it were real!"[2]

This is true. But Whitman believed in his dream world. Except for moments of alarmed scepticism in Democratic Vistas, he trusted his vision of the New World and kept his faith. He was, after

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[1]R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam, pp. 4-5.

[2]Leslie Fiedler, "Images of Walt Whitman," in Milton Hindus, ed., Leaves of Grass One Hundred Years After (Stanford, 1955), p. 73.

all, an approximation of his own idea of the democratic bard: "As he sees the farthest he has the most faith."[1]

Although his New World was not entirely actual, it was not entirely a dream-world either. Professor Charles Feidelson[2] has argued with careful discrimination that the "newness" is a metaphysical newness, a progressively discovered symbolic reality. Whitman was not interested in describing reality, but in creating it. It was a matter of process, a process in which the voyaging ego (which is as much the reader as it is the poet) brings things from becoming to being by perceiving them symbolistically. He was a transcendentalist with an intense faith in symbolic reality.

This too is true, though we may legitimately question whether Whitman's contemporaries in Britain or America could be expected to recognize it with any degree of clarity. For Whitman himself was not clear about his symbolistic leanings. The better of his critics recognized that the "I" of the poems was more than Whitman himself, that his interest in the New Man was really an interest in "the changed attitude of the ego" towards the world, and that his "New World" was more than the American states. Without Feidelson's historical perspective, we can expect no more of them.

However subtle and complex we make his mission, his general

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[1] Democratic Vistas, quoted by J. M. Robertson, Walt Whitman (Edinburgh, 1884), p. 14.

[2] Symbolism in American Literature (Chicago, 1953), pp. 17-22.

importance as a spokesman is not likely to be underrated. The New Zealand critic who, in the context of a book on Mr. T. S. Eliot, makes a rejection of Whitman synonymous with a rejection of America,[1] does not really stand alone. In American criticism Whitman is often brought forward as a piece of heavy artillery to do battle with the highbrows who have not shaken themselves free of Europe.[2] But because the issues were not restricted geographically to America, because they were broad issues characteristic of the modern world, Whitman drew considerable attention from--and gave significant stimulation to--British writers and reviewers. They saw something of their own "new world," symbolistic or otherwise, in Whitman; they were quick to evaluate it.

There is some difficulty in reconstructing Whitman as he must have appeared to his contemporaries. They could not see the drift towards symbolism which we are only beginning to see. There is further difficulty in explaining his thought, fitting its strands into some kind of pattern.

> Do I contradict myself?
> Very well then I contradict myself,
> (I am large, I contain multitudes).[3]

He not only pushed aside the law of non-contradiction, but he warned his friends, with more dramatic flair and Socratic pose

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[1]Sydney Musgrave, Walt Whitman and T. S. Eliot (Wellington, N.Z., 1952).

[2]Leslie Fiedler, op. cit., p. 71.

[3]"Song of Myself," in CPSP, p. 84.

than truth, that he had no theories:

> I charge you, too, forever, reject those who would expound me--for I cannot expound myself.... I am something different: I don't provide theories for people: I ask them about their own theories--I spur them on so they do their own speculation.[1]

But these disavowals are really Whitman's mask; they are gestures of identification of the poet with his fellow men. The "I" is the symbolic ego, searching, creating. In spite of them Whitman has put together a forceful statement of the literary needs and principles of modern democratic society. If he cannot be reduced to a formula, the tendency and thrust of his position are still quite clear. He made his point often--so often that it is quite unlikely that any of his British critics could have escaped hearing him on the subject. Entire sections throughout the poems, and the whole of the long "By Blue Ontario's Shore," deal directly with the requirements of democratic American literature, as do Whitman's important prose pieces, especially the 1855 "Preface" (of which "By Blue Ontario's Shore" is a re-statement in verse), Democratic Vistas (1871), the Preface to As A Strong Bird on Pinions Free (1872), and A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads (1888).

There is a final difficulty: seeing Whitman's theories in relation to his creative achievements. He looks dull, witless, and pedestrian when we make him an expounder of ideas about

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[1]Quoted by Horace Traubel, "Introduction," Leaves of Grass (1) and Democratic Vistas (London, 1912), p. xi.

democracy and literature. And few poets can be quoted to their own disadvantage as extensively as Whitman can; perhaps no poet has unwittingly written so many parodies of himself. The truth is that Whitman, no keen judge of other literature,[1] was a very poor judge of his own. Perhaps the real point that Whitman demonstrates is this: the accomplishments and the blunders of an artist as artist have little to do with the theories about art that he holds. If some of the more prosaic or bombastic crudities of the "barbaric yawp" are the ill-formed progeny of Whitman's democratic poetics, so are the haunting moods and majestic, harmonious symbols of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed" and the striking unity of "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" its beautiful children. The balance is never easy to achieve. It must be remembered that Whitman did not always tie himself to the rigidity of his own poetics; he was scarcely conscious of the symbolism which Professor Feidelson finds in his work. But even if Whitman's poems are not always understandably results of his theories, the theories deserve attention: for he meant them, along with the poems, to describe and determine modern democratic literature.

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[1] It is amusing to recall, for example, that Whitman sent his sister a copy of Lady Audley's Secret (Nov. 23, 1866) and "a handsome little volume of Florence Percy's poems" (Christmas, 1866). CPSP, 962-3.

I.

Already in 1846, as a young journalist with vague aspirations to be a poet, Whitman was writing that America must rid itself of the dull influence of European literature.

> He who desires to see this noble Republic independent, not only in name but in fact, of all unwholesome foreign sway must ever bear in mind the influence of European literature over us.[1]

Already as a young man he felt confident that "God /has/ given the American mind powers of analysis and acuteness superior to those possessed by any other nation on earth."[2] Forty-two years later, old, sick, and unrecognized, he showed no alteration of feelings.

> Of the great poems received from abroad and from the ages, is there one that is consistent with these United States...? Is there one whose underlying basis is not a denial and insult to democracy? What a comment it forms, anyhow, on this era of literary fulfillment, with the splendid day-rise of science and resuscitation of history, that our chief religions and poetical works are not our own, nor adapted to our light, but have been furnish'd by far-back ages out of their arriere and darkness, or, at most, twilight dimness! What is there in those works that so imperiously and scornfully dominates all our advanced civilization, and culture?[3]

It was his conviction that the nation, like the people who constitute it, should bask in "the perfect uncontamination and

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[1] "Home Literature," CPSP, p. 554.

[2] Ibid.

[3] "A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 865.

solitariness of individuality."[1]

Notice how easily interchangeable the words *past* and *foreign* are for Whitman. The figure of a corpse can serve for either.

> America, curious toward foreign characters...
> Does not repel them or the past or what they have
> produced under their forms,
> perceives the corpse slowly borne from the house,
> Perceives that it waits a little while in the door.
> that it was fittest for its days,
> That its life has descended to the stalwart and well-
> shaped heir who approaches,
> And that he shall be fittest for his days.[2]

The heir, democracy, must found its own forms of art, education, and theology, "displacing all that exists, or that has been produced anywhere in the past, under opposite influences."[3] The poets of Europe and Asia had done their work; American poets must now come, not only to displace them, but also to surpass them.[4]

In justice to Whitman, whose nationalism and isolationism can easily be made absurd, it must be remembered that he acknowledged his debts to ancient and European traditions.

> In the name of these States shall I scorn the antique?
> Why these are the children of the antique to justify it.[5]

In reminiscing about old-world literature he said, "If I had not stood before those poems with uncovered head, fully aware of the

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[1] *Democratic Vistas*, p. 333.

[2] "By Blue Ontario's Shore," *CPSP*, p. 313.

[3] *Democratic Vistas*, p. 303.

[4] *Cf.* "By Blue Ontario's Shore," *CPSP*, p. 312.

[5] *CPSP*, p. 16.

colossal grandeur and beauty of form and spirit, I could not have written Leaves of Grass."[1] Even democracy is "earth's resumé entire."[2] But his tributes to tradition are rare, and they are almost negated by his sense of the separateness and distinctiveness of democratic American culture.

Whitman insisted upon cultural separation because, for one thing, he saw America as above and beyond Europe. This may sound naive. But Whitman, like many of his liberal contemporaries, believed in the evolutionary progress of history and regarded America as man's unqualified step towards further perfectability.[3] If this still sounds naive, we can remind ourselves again, as Professor David Daiches reminds us, that Whitman's America was not a statistical fact but a vision, a potential;[4] it was, in Leslie Fiedler's words, "made in France, the romantic notion out of Rousseau and Chateaubriand of an absolute anti-Europe, an utter anti-culture made flesh, the Noble Savage as a continent."[5] Whitman was aware of the actual shortcomings of American culture,

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[1] CPSP, p. 866.

[2] Ibid., p. 412.

[3] Whitman applies the same theory directly to his own work. "As America fully and fairly construed is the legitimate result and evolutionary outcome of the past, so would I dare to claim for my verse...." ("A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 866.)

[4] David Daiches, Literary Essays (Edinburgh, 1956), pp. 67-68.

[5] Fiedler, op. cit., p. 65.

and discussed them at length in Democratic Vistas. But the vision was more real to him, more compelling, than the actual. And the society which he envisaged had to have new standards, standards which, apparently because they were new, were better, and naturally displaced the old. Thus,

> ... [T]he Old World has had the poems of myths, fictions, feudalism, conquest, caste, dynastic wars, and splendid exceptional characters and affairs, which have been great; but the new world needs the poems of realities and science and of the democratic average and basic equality, which shall be greater.[1]

And thus he commended Shakespeare but found his style "stopping short of the grandest sort, at any rate for fulfilling and satisfying modern and scientific and democratic American purposes."[2] Whitman is here taking his place in a broad movement, didactic in character and realistic in its social concern--a movement of which Tolstoy is also a part. He did not want the past or European culture to contaminate this movement in America. Like Tolstoy, he found that Shakespeare's feudalistic treatment of common people in the comedies made these plays "altogether unacceptable" for the modern, enlightened world.[3]

But here the criterion is already shifting, overlapping Whitman's second condition for American culture. American culture had to be kept free of European influence because American culture

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[1] "A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 866.

[2] "A Look at Shakespeare," CPSP, p. 824.

[3] Ibid.

had to be a popular culture, giving body and voice to the "democratic average." This is partly what Whitman meant by the present, and partly what he meant by America--an age and a society of the "divine average." His cross-examination of the American writer of the future affirmed the need for complete rapport between the writer, the present, and the masses. (Note how quickly appropriate defendants come to mind as Whitman's questions are read: Henry James, for example, or T. S. Eliot.)

> ... /A/re you really of the whole People?
> Are you not of some coterie? some school or mere religion?
> Have you not imported this or the spirit of it in some ship?
> Has it not dangled long at the heels of the poets, politicians, literati, of enemies' lands?
> Does it not assume that what is notoriously gone is still here?[1]

II.

That the demand for a distinctively democratic literature became identified with the realistic movement is not accidental. For Whitman "realism" was a sine qua non of democratic literature. Healthy and vital democratic society had no use for romance. "As soon as histories are properly told," growls the 1855 Preface, "no more need of romances."[2] He thought "imported" literature to be--and one wonders from this how much of it he could have read--

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[1] "By Blue Ontario's Shore," CPSP, pp. 318-319.

[2] CPSP, p. 581.

> thin sentiments of parlours, parasols, piano-songs, ...or whimpering and crying about something, chasing one aborted conceit after another, and for ever occupied in dyspeptic amours with dyspeptic women.[1]

Whitman's urge to be real and vigorous and manly led him to strange positions as a critic. Leaves of Grass, he proudly affirmed, contains "nothing...for Beauty's sake." Its concern is with "the broadest average of humanity...in each of their countless examples and practical occupations in the United States today."[2] There is in all of this some of the Yankee practicality that made him cry, "Muscle and pluck forever!"[3]

In one of those unfortunate passages that can be quoted against him, Whitman pictures the muse pulling out of Greece and Rome and Europe and hurrying to America. It is here that she will find peace and the stuff of poetry;

> By thud of machinery and shrill steam whistle undismay'd,
> Bluff'd not a bit by drainpipe, gasometers, artificial fertilizers,
> Smiling and pleased with palpable intent to stay,
> She's here, install'd amid the kitchen-ware![4]

The muse in all that noise and metal: Whitman meant it. The common and the ordinary were the materials of art. He intended a general statement of aesthetics, and hoped it would be strictly enforced for all American artists. America, he announced, "shall

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[1] Democratic Vistas, p. 342.

[2] "A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 861.

[3] "Song of the Broad Axe," CPSP, p. 175.

[4] "Song of the Exposition," CPSP, p. 183.

receive no pleasure from violations of natural models, and must not permit them."[1] In painting or carving, or even in the illustration of papers and books, there must be nothing which "distorts honest shapes, or which creates unearthly beings or places or contingencies...."[2]

Underneath all this there is an unorthodox but thoroughgoing materialism. Whitman picked this up from his age and made it a condition of American thought and art. The fact that he was simultaneously a materialist and a spiritualist without admitting to being a dualist need not detain us here. Contradictions did not bother Whitman. His kind of materialism, with its strange jargon about "spiritualizing" material things, tells us something about the necessity of his moving towards symbolism; it is also, like phrenology, a curiosity of the man and his age. A good sample of it, and of the semantic tangles that accompanied it, can be found in the writings of Oscar L. Triggs, an American disciple of Whitman who lectured on Whitman before the Browning Society in London in 1892. Triggs saw engines and instruments to be the result of "the conquest of matter by the spirit of man." He went on to explain to his London audience: "The beautiful winged electric car which passes my door in Minneapolis like a thing bewitched, is a perpetual protest against materialistic

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[1] "Preface," 1855, CPSP, p. 581.

[2] Ibid.

ideas and the crowning witness to a people's ideal thought."[1] Walt Whitman would have liked that as heartily as Triggs liked Whitman.

This kind of unorthodox materialism, part of what Whitman thought was the New World way of looking at the world, lent some startling effects to his poetry. He seems to have been fond of the paradox. "I will make the poems of materials," he writes, "for I think they are to be the most spiritual poems."[2] This exposition of the divine within the common Whitman saw as the artist's greatest task. It is only within this context that we can read rightly his profession: "I accept Reality and dare not question it, Materialism first and last imbuing."[3]

Whitman felt that materialistic realism was demanded, not only by egalitarian democracy, but also by modern science. He was especially insistent upon this towards the end of his life. In "A Backward Glance" he discussed fact and imagination. "Whatever may have been the case in years gone by," he writes,

> the true use of the imaginative faculty of modern times is to give ultimate vivification to facts, to science, and to common lives, endowing them with glows and glories...which belong to every real thing, and to real things only.[4]

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[1]Oscar L. Triggs, Browning and Whitman: A Study in Democracy (London, 1893), p. 30.

[2]"Starting from Paumanok," CPSP, p. 17.

[3]"Song of Myself," CPSP, p. 48.

[4]"A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 861.

The modern American artist, he goes on, must

> conform with and build on the concrete realities and theories of the universe furnish'd by science...henceforth the only irrefragable basis for anything, verse included....[1]

He had little fear that science would devour poetry: science was only "a firmer, vaster, broader new area...to which the poetic genius must emigrate."[2] It was as important to new, modern literature as was the physical stuff of the actual world.

III.

In one of those interesting reviews which Whitman wrote anonymously in praise of himself and his book, he gives us a picture of the ideal American poet (himself) in the glory of his defiant independence of "culture":

> Self-reliant, with haughty eyes, assuming to himself all the attributes of his country, steps Walt Whitman into literature, talking like a man unaware that there was hitherto such a production as a book, or such a being as a writer.... Every word that falls from his mouth shows silent disdain and defiance of the old theories and forms.... Not a whisper comes out of him of the old stock talk and rhyme of poetry....[3]

This is the kind of proud, individualistic sneer that Whitman always had for the word "culture." He seems to have wanted an anti-aesthetic Yankee Bohemianism, thriving on muscle and crowds

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[1] "A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 865.

[2] Ibid., p. 868.

[3] Quoted by Bertram Dobell in his edition of James Thomson, Walt Whitman: Man and Poet (London, 1910), pp. x-xi.

and tram-rides and health rather than on old prints and French poets and the desperate consumptive cough. He liked to assert his separation from libraries and literature and manners. He was always trying to convince people that he read very little, that he went to school to the out-of-doors. In fact, he tried too hard: he had really read a great deal more than he cared to admit; he apparently felt his reading to be a kind of betrayal of his own beliefs.[1] For in the complex of those beliefs book was a kind of suspect word; and Whitman, to avoid bad company, re-assured his readers in Leaves of Grass:

> Camerado, this is no book,
> Who touches this touches a man....[2]

When dealing with this question, as with too many others, Whitman became a preacher rather than a poet. Culture, like foreign influence, he regarded as a Trojan horse; it threatened real danger to America. Thus,

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[1] Whitman deceived most of his contemporaries about his reading. Moncure Conway, for example, having been told by Whitman that he (Whitman) had very few books, went on at great length to explain to his readers Whitman's limited reading. [See C. W. Moulton, ed., The Library of Literary Criticism (Buffalo, 1905), VIII, 130.] Research in Whitman's writings and conversations reveals, however, that he had really read a great deal. Norman Foerster regards him, in quantity and quality, as a more thorough reader than Poe. (American Criticism, pp. 156-165.) Though his reading was sporadic and probably not always conscientious, some of it was surprisingly perspicacious. [See Maruice O. Johnson, Walt Whitman as a Critic of Literature (Lincoln, Neb., 1938).]

[2] "Songs of Parting," CPSP, p. 452.

> If you would be freer than all that has been before,
> come listen to me.
> Fear grace, elegance, civilization, delicatesse....
> Beware what proceeds the decay of the ruggedness of states
> and men.[1]

For culture, as Whitman conceived it (or failed to conceive it), lacks genuineness; it is artificial, not natural; it reduces the healthy responses to nature, which are instinctive in man, to nothingness.[2]

When Whitman must provide a replacement for the culture he would let die, he gets into trouble. The "healthy opposite" he would plant is usually nothing more than one of the platitudinous intangibles of the manly and open West. For him the argument was quite simple: you could choose between the sort of thing that Matthew Arnold, the apostle of culture, brought to Whitman's mind--"Hangings, curtains, finger-bowls, china-ware"[3]--and the sort of thing the outdoors brought to Whitman's mind--"an odor...as from the forests of pine in Maine, or breath of an Illinois prairie."[4]

Here again, in the construction of so gross an oversimplification of the concept of culture, Whitman's passion for democracy was at work. This is a New World, a world in which "genteel little creatures" cannot be poets; a world in which

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[1]"By Blue Ontario's Shore," CPSP, p. 312.

[2]Democratic Vistas, p. 330.

[3]Quoted by Lionel Trilling, Matthew Arnold (London, 1939), p. 397.

[4]"Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood," CPSP, p. 411.

> People's lips salute only doers, lovers, satisfiers,
> positive knowers,
> There will shortly be no more priests, I say their
> work is done....[1]

The over-simplification, the falseness of the antithesis, was inevitable. For Whitman's America was not an actual America; it was an America yet-to-be-realized, a living potentiality for the full development of a human greatness of a different and unprecedented kind--a natural greatness having nothing to do with the traditional distinctions of rank and class.

Still, his thinking on culture in America was directed to his own time. And what he really advocated, of course, was not the extinction of culture but the reformation of culture. The standards of the new culture will be very different from the standards of past cultures. Within it he "will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on equal terms."[2] He characterized the culture he envisaged in Democratic Vistas. "I should demand," he wrote,

> a programme of culture, drawn out, not for a single class alone, or for the parlours or lecture-rooms, but with an eye to the practical life, the west, the working men.... It must have for its spinal meaning the formation of a typical personality of character ...(which is) not restricted by conditions ineligible to the masses. The best culture will always be that of the manly and courageous instincts.[3]

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[1] "By Blue Ontario's Shore," CPSP, p. 320.

[2] "Song of Myself," CPSP, p. 49.

[3] Democratic Vistas, p. 331.

By what standards of taste and judgement can one evaluate the products of such a culture? How can the arts be guaranteed survival? Does not the narrow didacticism and the subjection of the artist to mass opinion deny the whole principle of culture? Such questions are an important part of the age. And so is Whitman's answer:

> ...We pronounce not so much against the principle of culture; we only supervise it, and promulgate along with it, as deep, perhaps a deeper, principle.[1]

And this principle (a radical one for any philosophy of culture) is, of course, the principle of equality. A free, unfettered, democratic society governed by the principle of equality would, thought Whitman, inspire, produce, cultivate, and correctly judge its own new arts.

IV.

The new writer and the new society would have to come to some sort of understanding about their relationship to each other. Whitman, like many critics and writers throughout the world in the nineteenth century,[2] regarded literature as a product of society, deriving its character from the society which spawns it. And American society, formed of ordinary people who do not know how

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[1] Democratic Vistas, p. 337.

[2] Cf. Brooks and Wimsatt, Literary Criticism: A Short History (New York, 1957).

it feels "to stand in the presence of superiors,"[1] gives the writer unsurpassed richness of subject and theme. American social habits, such as "the President's taking off his hat to them, not they to him--these too are unrhymed poetry." They only await "the gigantic and generous treatment" worthy of them.[2] His confident belief that American literature would outstrip all other literatures was based entirely upon his confident belief that American society would outstrip all other societies. The poet had only to link himself symbolically to the society. His optimism got him into a position from which he could scarcely understand how, by contrast, anything worthwhile could ever have been written in the Mediterranean area or in Europe. This is one of his most important statements:

> Think of the United States today...sixty or seventy millions of equals, with their lives, their possessions, their future--these incalculable, modern, American, seething multitudes around us, of which we are inseparable parts! Think, in comparison, of the petty environage and limited area of the poets of past or present Europe, no matter how great their genius. Think of the absence and ignorance, vitality, and the unprecedented stimulants of today and here. It almost seems as if a poetry with cosmic and dynamic features of magnitude and limitlessness suitable to the human soul, were never possible before. It is certain that a poetry of absolute faith and equality for the democratic senses never was.[3]

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[1] "Preface," 1855, CPSP, p. 583.

[2] Ibid.

[3] "A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 863.

So dependent is literature upon society, Whitman thought, that it cannot come from isolated individual writers who are at odds with their ages. It must be carefully remembered, he wrote, that

> first class literature does not shine by any luminosity of its own; nor do its poems. They grow out of circumstances.... The actual living light is always curiously from elsewhere....[1]

And yet, while literature is dependent upon society, the relationship is actually a reciprocal one for Whitman. Literature does not only feed on society; it also feeds society, and helps to form it. Literature, he noted, not only mirrored but also held together and gave support to "the feudal, ecclesiastical, dynastic world over there--forming its osseous structure...."[2] He saw the nineteenth century caught in what the sociologists call a cultural lag: the hold of "feudal" literature "still prevails to this day, in defiance of the mighty changes of time...."[3]

So Whitman's plea was for a new and more adequate literature, a literature adequate to express and to bind together (in the manner of the old bardic tradition) the new society--a literature which would derive its energy from a new "luminosity."

So far Whitman is quite clear. But it is just at this point that most of the questions arise. Whitman makes but little effort

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[1] "A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 862.

[2] Democratic Vistas, p. 305.

[3] Ibid.

to answer them. He seems to have been convinced that both the new literature and the new society would develop apace, hand in hand. He holds us off with that annoying manner that Mr. Ezra Pound writes of: Whitman's pretense of "conferring a philanthropic benefit on the race by recording his own self-complacency."[1] He gives us general statements, the thrust of which seem to be that American society, if true to itself, cannot but inspire great literature, and that this literature will be dependent upon the general public's acceptance of it: "The proof of a poet shall be sternly deferr'd till his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it."[2] This public acceptance raises no great problem, as the democratic society Whitman envisaged would recognize and honor good literature with confidence and sound judgment: "If its poets appear (the public) will in due time advance to meet them, there is no fear of mistake..."[3]

It is curious to see Whitman, with all his faith in "the word modern, the word en masse," living almost completely without honor in his own democratic society while winning quite considerable praise in "feudal-aristocratic" Britain.[4] But it is to his credit as a man that even this did not seem to shake his faith.

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[1]Ezra Pound, The Spirit of Romance (London, 1910), p. 178.

[2]Democratic Vistas, p. 320.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Cf. Harold Blodgett, Walt Whitman in England (Ithaca, 1934), p. vii, pp. 8, 9, et. seq.

His faith was not completely naive, either. He knew the weaknesses and dangers of a completely democratic culture theoretically as well as actually. Already in the 1855 "Preface," with an obvious touch of Carlylese, he took a glimpse at the horrible vision of a society reduced to the common level of life without spirit; he warned against

> ...the melancholy prudence of the abandonment of such a great being as man is, to the toss and pallor of years of money-making, with all their scorching days and icy nights...and the issuing sickness and desperate revolt at the close of a life without elevation or naivete....[1]

His respect (an almost inconsistent respect) for Carlyle and Hegel and other critics of democracy did not diminish: he considered their warnings, because they were plausible, to be of great value.[2] In Democratic Vistas Whitman himself called attention to the specific danger of producing a merely popular mass literature to the exclusion of an unheeded literature of quality.

> Today, in books, in the rivalry of writers, especially novelists, success (so called) is for him or her who strikes the mean flat average, the sensational appetite for stimulus.... To such...the audiences are limitless and profitable...while this day, or any day, to workmen portraying interior or spiritual life, the

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[1] CPSP, pp. 582-583.

[2] Whitman tells us that Democratic Vistas owes a debt to Shooting Niagara (footnote, p. 313). Whitman wrote two articles on Carlyle at the time of Carlyle's death. For a joint tribute to Hegel and Carlyle as critics of democracy, see also CPSP, p. 781.

> audiences were limited, and often laggard--but they last forever.[1]

"Mean flat average"--this from the exuberant poet who shouts in several places, "O Divine Average!" It would seem to indicate certain reservations about the brimming prospects of the new literature in the new society, or indicate at least an awareness of the gap between the dream and the actual in American society.

This kind of fear does not, however, occur to Whitman very often.[2] It is only a faint undertone. It crops up again three years before his death, when he speaks of an instinct within democracy to "clip, conform, bring in stragglers, and reduce everything to a dead level." But he was sure that individualism could cure this; and though modern science seemed to be endangering the individuality of man's soul, this was "an appearance only; the reality is quite different. The new influences, upon the whole, are surely preparing the way for grander individualities than ever."[3]

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[1] Democratic Vistas, p. 342.

[2] Nor does it occur to many of his disciples. Oscar L. Triggs, for example, bemoans "an almost total lack in criticism, of a serious study of literature from the standpoint of the people." (Triggs, op. cit., p. 6) "The higher literature is destined," says Triggs, "under our democratic advance, to come to the judgment of the people. And the people, I believe, will come to the masters of song with serious minds, asking not for entertainment, but for life.... Old formulae will have no power to chain and bind. Their criticism will care supremely for the soul of man." (Ibid., p. 7.)

[3] "A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 870.

Perhaps it was because Whitman never really studied the problem that he always retained his hope. The democratic American states, free from Europe, "with veins full of poetical stuff, most need poets, and are to have the greatest, and use them the greatest...."[1] This he never really doubted. What seemed to be an occasional doubt was really only an occasional trace of impatience (to which his own poverty and neglect surely entitled him) and eager anticipation. His role was that of both midwife and expectant father; he was confident but excited.

> Soul of love and tongue of fire!
> Eye to pierce the deepest depths and sweep the world!
> Ah Mother, prolific and full in all besides, yet
> how long barren, barren?[2]

But the new society was such that the barrenness was soon to be over:

> Poets to come! Orators, singers, musicians to come!
> Not today is to justify me and answer what I am for,
> But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental,
> greater than before known,
> Arouse! for you must justify me.[3]

V.

Many literary revolts are revolts against what are at the time conventional mechanics of literature. But Whitman, in demanding a new democratic literature, was concerned with much more than

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[1] "By Blue Ontario's Shore," CPSP, p. 316.

[2] Ibid.

[3] "Poets to Come," CPSP, p. 13.

that. This must be clearly understood. The observation becomes sharpened if we note, perhaps unfairly, that Whitman himself as a matter of fact inherited far too many of the poorer conventions. He used the archaisms thee and thou to address everything from locomotives to prostitutes; he generally scorned "average speech," and favored some jolting poetic diction. His use of the sea is a case in point: it is not so much a use of symbol as it is a reliance on a handy prop. British readers may not understand the banality and triteness of that old Midwest picnic-orator's catalogue of sea, ship, compass, billows, and port as an easy metaphor for "life." It has haunted the language since Washington, in his farewell address, talked of steering the ship of state. But Whitman took even Lincoln, a treasure-house of native American characteristics, all of them distinctly non-nautical, and put him out to sea as a dying captain in order to mourn him. He began another eulogy of Lincoln with "No more for him life's stormy conflicts";[1] he addressed the moon as "Thou orb aloft full dazzling!";[2] and he talked of going "down history's great highways,/ Ever undimn'd by time..."[3] and of "acting that great play on history's stage eterne."[4]

This is not to suggest that Whitman was a conventional poet completely at home with the conventions. We need only glance at

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[1] CPSP, p. 309.

[2] Ibid., p. 417. [3] Ibid., p. 436. [4] Ibid., p. 463.

the diction, the stanza forms, the length of the lines, the use of symbols and of parallel structure to remind ourselves that Whitman was an innovator of considerable accomplishment. This is not to suggest, either, that he was an inferior poet. Mr. Randall Jarrell has done an excellent job of reminding twentieth-century readers of the worth of Whitman--by the excellent expedient of gathering into one essay a kind of anthology of Whitman's better lines.[1] It is only to suggest that form and technique seem to have been a kind of accident for Whitman, sometimes happy, sometimes disastrous; that, despite his occasional grumbling about

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[1]"To show Whitman for what he is," writes Mr. Jarrell, "one does not need to praise or explain or argue, one needs simply to quote." The quotations show us "a poet of the greatest and oddest delicacy and originality and sensitivity, so far as words are concerned." "In modern times," Jarrell asks, "what controlling, organizing, selecting poet has created a world with as much in it as Whitman's, a world that so plainly is the world?" He cites several sustained passages, and even a number of the catalogues; among the individual lines that he cites are these: "Agonies are one of my changes of garments"; the image of himself "leaping chasms with a pike-pointed staff, clinging to topples of brittle and blue"; the carpenter planeing, "the tongue of his foreplane whistles its wild ascending lisp"; "Three scythes at harvest whizzing in a row from three lusty angels with shirts bagg'd out at their waists,/ The snag-toothed hostler with red hair redeeming sins past and to come"; the poignant and psalm-like image of God, "the hugging and loving bed-fellow (who) sleeps at my side through the night, and withdraws at the break of day with stealthy tread,/ Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels, swelling the house with their plenty"; finally, the dazzlingly effective lines on music and metaphysics: "The orchestra whirls me wider than Uranus flies,/ It wrenches such ardors from me I did not know I possess'd them,/ It sails me, I dab with bare feet, they are lick'd by the indolent waves,/ I am cut by bitter and angry hail, I lose my breath,/ Steep'd amid honey'd morphine, my windpipe throttled in fakes of death,/ At length let up again to feel the puzzle of puzzles,/ And that we call Being." [Poetry and the Age (New York, 1955), pp. 101-120.]

conventions and traditional forms, he was not very intent upon consciously altering or displacing them; that his demand for a democratic literature was much more than a demand for fresh and new techniques.

What he wanted, more significantly, was a new literature rising out of and expressing a new perspective, "the changed attitude" of the voyaging ego. Literature must henceforth see all men as divine[1] and as laws unto themselves.[2] It must "inspire itself with science and the modern," and bend itself "toward the future, more than the past."[3] In this new literature, character will be the main requirement, "not mere erudition or elegance."[4] While cutting itself free of Europe and the past it must have "entire faith in itself, and in the products of its own democratic spirit, only."[5] It must speak for the whole of the people, not "some coterie...some school or mere religion."[6] It must be in no way exclusive; instead, its poets will come to each man and to each woman and say,

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[1]"What do you suppose I would intimate to you in a hundred ways, but that man or woman is as good as God,
And that there is no God any more divine than yourself?"
(CPSP, p. 234.)

[2]"The purpose of democracy," says Whitman, "is to illustrate, at all hazzards, this doctrine or theory that man, properly trained in sanest, highest freedom, may and must become a law, and a series of laws, unto himself." (Democratic Vistas, p. 313.)

[3]Ibid., p. 346. [4]Ibid., p. 347. [5]Ibid., p. 346.

[6]CPSP, p. 318.

> 'Come to us on equal terms, only then can you understand us. We are no better than you. What we inclose /sic/, you inclose, what we enjoy you may enjoy.'[1]

In this new literature there will be no room for doubt or ennui,[2] It must be a literature of "cheerful simplicity"[3] and faith and optimism; within it "no man thenceforward shall be degraded for ignorance or weakness or sin."[4] Notions of hell and original sin must be displaced by the new human religion of innate goodness, and this shall be "part of the test of the great literatus."[5]

Whitman complained that American society held itself back, and therefore postponed the day of its great achievement in literature. It did this mainly by holding to foreign or conventional or unscientific beliefs.[6] But here as everywhere progress seemed inevitable. The liberal-democratic outlines for both the society

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[1] "Preface," 1855, CPSP, p. 578.

[2] Ibid., p. 573; Democratic Vistas, p. 348.

[3] Democratic Vistas, p. 348.

[4] "Preface," 1855, CPSP, p. 573.

[5] Democratic Vistas, p. 348.

[6] Whitman complains, for example, of the strength of "outmoded" religious ideas. Science is absolute, a bursting sun that will not set. "But against it, deeply entrenched, holding possession, yet remains...the fossil theology of the...superstitious, untaught and credulous, fable-loving, primitive ages of humanity." (Democratic Vistas, p. 343 n.) Unprogressive ideas are also kept in circulation by "unregenerate poetry." (Ibid.) Religion is too important to be entrusted to the churches; "it must be consigned henceforth to democracy en masse and to literature." (CPSP, p. 726.) The states and cities must "resist much, obey little...." (CPSP, p. 10.)

and the literature--a narrowly didactic voice of the society--were set.

The characteristics we have been listing, all of them affecting the spirit and content of the new literature, were to Whitman the important characteristics. Its standards of form, said Whitman, relying on the romantic tradition, were to be only the standards of nature.[1] If we mean by form a conscious concern with craft and design and technique, then we are talking about something that Whitman regarded as being merely "aristocratic-European"; American writers should have little concern with form, for form should be immediate, spontaneous, created by spirit and emotion. In democratic literature, art and nature should be one.

It has been argued that Whitman's "democratic aesthetics" stop just short of advocating anarchy and complete formlessness in art.[2] This is true enough if we derive the theory only from Whitman's utterances and not from his practice. In practice Whitman was at times the bungler who lent himself to parody and at other times a great poet, a master craftsman. "To be an artist," said Sir James Barrie in Sentimental Tommy, " is a great thing, but to be an artist and not know it is the most glorious plight in the world." At times this seems to have been Whitman's

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[1] Democratic Vistas, p. 348.

[2] There is a lengthy discussion of this in Solomon Fishman, The Disinherited of Art: Writer and Background. See especially pp. 154-156.

plight. He would have chosen it for the writers who were to follow him as the shapers of the great new literature. For their work would be characterized mainly by its content, its spirit, its rapport with the mass of free men; its form would matter little; it would be, like Whitman's at its best, proper to the spirit and content, transparent, free, organic.

VI.

Much of the relevance of Whitman for the present time, in America or elsewhere, lies in the fact that his prophecy missed the mark so widely. Even Mark Twain, for all his nationalism and his desire to deflate Europe, defected. His depiction of American society in "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg," or even in Huckleberry Finn, is not in the tradition of the "new literature" that Whitman had in mind. It was Twain who scowled, through the device of Pudd'nhead Wilson's caustic calendar, that "It was wonderful to find America, but it would have been more wonderful to miss it." The case of Henry James is obvious. Is it not fair to say that most major American writers since Whitman, especially the writers in the twentieth century, write out of protest against Whitman's kind of America and his kind of literature? Add to the list Henry Adams, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens: all of them have left the main stream of American life; most of them are, in some sense, traditionalists; they do not attempt to speak for the "whole people" but are "of some coterie, some group"; they do not find the divine in the

common; they are formalists. Their achievement seems almost dependent upon their alienation from what is supposed to be the spirit of American society. That spirit is roughly the same as it was in Whitman's day: but the attitude of present writers towards it, and the basic beliefs of post-Whitman writers, have changed radically.

Whitman's experiments in language have, of course, had their influence, especially on the symbolists. But his effect on the form of modern literature, Bewley[1] reminds us, has not been entirely fortunate.

> His poetic discoveries were real enough in their way, but they had an effect on American art somewhat similar to the effects of the New World on Spain. The sudden acquisition of all that gold to be had with so little effort undermined everybody's morale, and in the end the losses may very well have exceeded the profit.

Significantly, it is an Englishman, D. H. Lawrence, who comes closest to stating what may be the mood and the psychology of the writers who have by-passed Whitman. They are not at home with Whitman because they do not belong to his America. Writes Lawrence:

> Men are free when they are obeying some deep, inward voice of religious belief. Obeying it from within. Men are free when they belong to a living, organic, <u>believing</u> community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealized purpose. Not when they are escaping to some wild west. The most unfree souls go west, and shout of freedom. Men are freest when they are most

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[1] <u>Complex Fate</u>, p. 151.

> unconscious of freedom. The shout is a rattling of chains, always was.[1]

In any case this shift of belief in American literature--certainly not restricted to American literature--makes a study of Whitman criticism in the nineteenth century the more essential and revealing: for the rumbles of intelligent dissent can be heard before the holocaust of World War I, before Hulme and Wyndham Lewis and Eliot, before Trumbull Stickney and George Cabot Lodge.

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[1]D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classical American Literature (Garden City, 1951), pp. 16-17.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HENRY JAMES: ART, EUROPE, AND AMERICA

Four days after the publication of Whitman's Leaves of Grass (July, 1855), Henry James, a boy of twelve, arrived in Europe with his family. Oddly enough, it was the same summer in which James A. McNeil Whistler, a jaunty, cocky twenty-one-year-old American fresh from his reading of La Vie de Boheme, arrived in Paris to study art. Hawthorne, with less intensity, was beginning the third of his seven years in Europe. While the prevailing orientation of a whole generation of Americans was towards the new man and the frontier, Henry James was to be found among a passionate minority of Americans who were oriented towards what James later called "the rich, the deep, the dark old world." James, already for the second time and not for the last time, was facing eastward, drinking in European education and culture.

His early training is important. He grew up seeing his parents lost in American ideology, "homesick...for the ancient order," and he came quite early to assume that the condition of living in such an order would constitute a precious kind of success.[1] In his boyhood he was exposed to little of the spirit of cultural nationalism as it was being expounded by the

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[1]Henry James, A Small Boy and Others (London, 1913), pp. 88-89.

Democratic Review and by Walt Whitman in the Brooklyn Eagle. His early years were dominated by talk of Europe, European books, "the strong smell of paper and printer's ink, known to us as the English smell."[1]

His brilliant and eccentric father, in a letter to Emerson which Mr. Van Wyck Brooks regards as "heretical,"[2] explained that he was taking the children abroad in search of "a better sensuous education."[3] They were already soaking up more of European art and literature than Yankee convention thought advisable;[4] but the elder James was an individualist with a plan; his patriotism (of which he really had a great deal) would be "livelier on the other side of the water";[5] it was important that his children's education be free of dogma and moral judgment, so that they could find the Divine Truth, imminent in the world, for themselves.[6]

This strange migration became, for Henry James, a life pattern. Out of it, out of this violently atypical and yet peculiarly

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[1] A Small Boy, p. 86.

[2] Van Wyck Brooks, The Pilgrimage of Henry James (London, 1928), pp. 1-2.

[3] Quoted by Leon Edel, Henry James: The Untried Years, 1843-1870 (London, 1953), p. 122.

[4] James read Punch with some regularity. The first book to really impress him was Baroness Tautphoeus's The Initials--a book with an international theme similar to that of Daisy Miller. He also read a good deal of Dickens. Cf. Ibid., pp. 97-101.

[5] Ibid., p. 140. [6] Ibid., p. 118.

American situation, came one of the major shapers of American literature. There was plenty of Whitman's "enemy," Europe, for young Henry James; although to balance it the circus and the popular theatre were also allowed into the educational plan. Such training gave him, as he himself said, his "first glimpse of that possibility of a 'free play of mind' over a subject" which was to throw him at a later stage of culture into the critical arms of Matthew Arnold.[1] He had been given no standard by which to judge the host of facts; he acquired "a terrible need for order, for design, for apprehending--and later communicating" the world about him.[2]

It is by the literature resulting from this need that James must ultimately stand or fall. Still, the milieu which he represents, with its sharp challenge to the idea of a simple native literature as represented by Whitman, Twain, Anderson, and Wolfe, is of great importance. The need which James and others feel for Europe, the past, social complexity, and tradition represents a major dissent from a strong and popular drift in modern literature.

The conflict between the two forces has been at times surprisingly intense. Until recently the odds in American criticism have been heavily against James. The liberals, descendants of Emerson and of the Democratic Review, have drawn him at worst as

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[1] A Small Boy, p. 171.

[2] Edel, op. cit., p. 119.

a dandy who, oppressed by the vulgarity of all that was genuinely American, spent his life gossiping and drinking tea with displaced but wealthy old European ladies; they have drawn him at best as an original writer whose flight and rootlessness and seclusion forced him into thinness, decline, and eventual sterility. Van Wyck Brooks has been the standard-bearer of this school; in The Pilgrimage of Henry James (1925), and again in The Flowering of New England, he belabored the thesis that James was ruined by his expatriation. Vernon Louis Parrington, a highly influential critic, created something of a scandal by excommunicating James from American literature in his monumental three-volume Main Currents in American Thought. Parrington allowed James a scant three pages, which he concluded with the revealing remark, "Yet how unlike he is to Sherwood Anderson, an authentic product of the American consciousness!"[1] The influence of Parrington and of Brooks has been very extensive; one finds a jolting statement of it, for example, in the widely used College Book of American Literature: "It is not certain that Henry James really belongs to American literature, for he was critical of America and admired Europe." Such extremism, if it had no other value, sharpened the issue and brought forth the more searching studies of such James scholars as F. O. Matthiessen, Leon Edel, Phillip Rahv, Edna Kenton, and William Van O'Connor.

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[1]V. L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, III, 241.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine James and his work, not fully, but as an expression of another important strain in modern literature, and as an expression of the nineteenth-century revolt against the literature of the "new society." Special attention will be given to James's treatment of the relationship between the artist and modern society--the problem of orientation--as it is found in his critical pieces, biographies, and letters as well as in pieces of fiction selected for their relevance.

I. "DISPATRIATISM"

The obvious question in James--the question of his expatriation--deserves to be cleared up first, because it pervades all other questions. Whitman was certain that democratic America was naturally self-sufficient for literature; James was certain that it was not. It is tempting to over-simplify this, to track down the details of James's implicit criticism and then deal with him as one who has deliberately snapped off the roots which had started in American soil. But the case is fuller and far more interesting than that.

In 1898, James wrote an essay (never since reprinted) called "The Storyteller at Large: Mr. Henry Harland." The theme of the essay was expatriation, and James registered his extreme disapproval of its rootlessness, its sickly attachment to "the "Europe of the American mind." Obviously self-conscious about his own unpopular position, he coined a word which defines that position accurately: dispatriation. He meant by it simply a

detachment in viewing, not a severance from interest in, one's homeland. The essay advocated, much in the manner of Arnold's plea for "disinterestedness," a dispassionate pursuit of truth; it was a plea (in our current trite phrase) for world citizenship, for social adjustment to the fact that "the globe is fast shrinking, for the imagination, to the size of an orange, to be played with...."[1] It is both charitable and accurate to adopt the word and to call James a dispatriate.

He was twenty-five when he first embarked for Europe alone; he had spent seven consecutive years in America, most of them at Harvard, and was already making a good reputation as a promising young writer. Indeed, three years earlier William Dean Howells had rated him "gifted enough to do better than anyone has yet done towards making us a real American novel."[2] The reason for his early self-exile is not perfectly clear. Part of it, surely, was a matter of intellectual loneliness.[3] There were also other personal reasons: his health and the fact that Harvard friends had gone on before. He could look back years later, however, and perceive that he had been obeying "impulses deeper than reason." Significantly there was no apparent quarrel with American culture; there was rather a personal feeling that he himself

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[1]Quoted by Edna Kenton, "Henry James in the World." Hound and Horn, VII (April-June 1934), 506-8.

[2]Edel, Untried Years, pp. 275-6.

[3]Ibid., p. 252.

did not fit, could not absorb from America, had not the requirements for becoming an indigenous writer.[1] In his own disinterested way, he knew America well. He had read Hawthorne eagerly, discussed American literature and its possibilities, and sought out the "American spirit" in respect of which he thought he had been starved. He wished to "rinse (his) mouth of the European aftertaste in order to do justice to whatever of the native bittersweet might offer itself."[2]

Two years before leaving for Europe, he wrote his feelings about writing in America to his friend Thomas Sargent Perry. He felt, he told Perry, like "a man of the past, of a dead generation." His only chance for success was "to let all the winds of the west blow through me at will." On both these counts he was Whitman's dead opposite. He was, however, extremely conscious of the fact that he was an American: "We are," he tells Perry, "Americans born--il faut en prendre son parti. I look upon it as a great blessing...." But the great blessing is a rather curious one: "...to be an American is an excellent preparation /italics mine/ for culture." In extolling the "exquisite qualities" of the American race, he hits upon an idea which is at the heart of his attitude towards American literature and gives birth to his dispatriation:

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[1]F. W. Dupee, Henry James (American Men of Letters Series) (London, 1951), pp. 67-86.

[2]Notes of a Son and Brother (London, 1914), p. 284.

> We have exquisite qualities as a race, and it seems to me that we are ahead of the European races in the fact that more than either of them we can deal freely with forms of civilization not our own, can pick and choose and assimilate and in short (aesthetically &c.) claim our property wherever we find it.[1]

This dealing "freely with the forms of civilization not our own" is Henry James's starting point. He tried to keep this detachment throughout his life. He was not merely fleeing; he was trying (almost patriotically) to put into practice the one great advantage of the American writer. In a different sense from Whitman he was seeking and looking towards a distinctively national literature:

> To have no national stamp has hitherto been a regret and a drawback, but I think it not unlikely that American writers may yet indicate that a vast intellectual fusion and synthesis of the various National tendencies of the world is the condition of more important achievements than any we have seen. I expect nothing great in your lifetime or mine, perhaps; but my instincts quite agree with yours in looking to see something original and beautiful disengage itself from our ceaseless fermentation and turmoil. You see I am willing to leave it a matter of instinct. God speed the day.[2]

His dispatriation never sounded harsh notes of hostility towards America. During the first interruption of his life abroad--he was back in America during 1871--he sent to Charles E. Norton his conclusion that "the face of nature and civilization in this our

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[1]Edel, op. cit., p. 269.

[2]Ibid., pp. 269-270.

country is to a certain point a very sufficient literary field."[1] He bewailed American provincialism and complained that "there is but one word to be used with regard to [Americans] --vulgar, vulgar, vulgar";[2] but this was not mere snobbishness; it was the honest protest of an energetic twenty-six year old cultivated American (who had drunk deeply of Europe), a protest against Mark Twain's kind of Yankee ridicule of all that is merely different from America. In the same letter, one of his first from Europe, he went on to say, echoing Arnold,

> On the other hand, we seem a people of character, we seem to have energy, capacity and intellectual stuff in ample measure. What I have pointed out as our vices are the elements of the modern man with culture quite left out.[3]

It is almost a description of Strether in The Ambassadors or of Christopher Newman in The American. Edel rightly points out that James invariably stressed not the deficiencies but the "innate nobility" of his "innocent" American characters in Europe.[4] He never lost sight of America. "I know what I am about," he wrote to William James in 1878, "and I have always my eyes on my native land."[5] Mary Garland's feeling in Rome in James's first novel is surely his own: "To enjoy so much beauty

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[1]Henry James, Letters, edited by Percy Lubbock (London, 1920), I, 30.

[2]Ibid., p. 22. [3]Ibid.

[4]Edel, op. cit., p. 310.

[5]Letters, I, 60.

and wonder is to break with the past...." But Rowland's answer is also James's answer: "Forget it, turn away from it, give yourself up to this.... Don't mind the pain.... Enjoy, enjoy; it's your duty."[1]

None of this is the language of a bitter expatriate, seeking freedom and pleasure in hasty flight. And there is always this note of duty and necessity in James's description of his position. He complained to Howells of "this destiny of desolate exile--this dreary necessity."[2]

Just as he avoided being hostile to America, so he avoided a naive satisfaction with Europe. At the beginning of his dispatriation he wrote to Norton,

> It's a complex fate, being an American, and one of the responsibilities it entails is fighting against a superstitious valuation of Europe.[3]

He determined to avoid provincialism at all costs, and he knew (perhaps from Arnold) the easy trap of European provincialism. His dispatriation had to avoid all risk of seeing life through the given spectacles of <u>any</u> culture: for any one of them he regarded as inferior to the position of being able to "deal freely with the forms of civilization not our own." He did a surprising amount of theorizing about his position as a dispatriate.

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[1] Henry James, <u>Roderick Hudson</u> (London, 1921), pp. 292-4.

[2] <u>Letters</u>, I, 34.

[3] <u>Ibid</u>., I, 30-31.

His studies of artists, first published in Harper's and collected in Picture and Text (1893), show his concern: four of the eight artists he considered (Edwin A. Abbey, Frank Millet, Charles S. Reinhart, and John Singer Sargent) were American expatriates. The essay on Henry Harland is another study of an American expatriate. But the best and most revealing of these is the two-volume study of William Wetmore Story and his Friends,[1] a charming and fascinating document of James's own relations with Europe. James reveals Story, an American sculptor, as a man who drank too eagerly of the richness of Europe; he was ruined by his own lack of detachment. Unable to survive transplantation, he became a European provincial, "a beautiful sacrifice to a noble mistake." Roderick Hudson's tragedy is caused in part by the same kind of failure. Even Hawthorne, in James's view, was hurt by Europe; his limited genius was inadequate to Europe, and he "forfeited a precious advantage in ceasing to tread his native soil."[2]

James's sense of intricate balance and cautious detachment can be seen not only in his fiction and criticism, but also in his life and letters. The excitement he felt upon meeting

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[1]Though generally ignored, this book is finally getting some attention as an important work. See especially M. D. Zabel's The Portable Henry James (New York, 1951), p. 689, and Philip Rahv's The Discovery of Europe (Boston, 1947), p. 270.

[2]Henry James, Hawthorne (London, 1879), p. 165.

Turgenev indicates a feeling of kinship: for Turgenev was also an émigré; Russian society, like American society, was in a state of solution and formation, and Turgenev was having what James called "a poet's quarrel with it."[1] James saw Turgenev, as he was beginning to see himself, as a kind of missionary, alienated from the soil he loved, looking to Europe for the salvation of his countrymen. This was inspiring to James (as was his glimpse of the distinguished Turgenev playing charades on all fours in a smart Parisian drawing-room); but as he began to assume Turgenev's attitude, he remembered the pitfalls of "too fond an attachment." We can look at him with both awe and amusement as he shuttles back and forth between London and Paris during the beginning of his European sojourn, dispatching casual letters about his changing feelings towards each. In May, 1876 he is in Paris,

> turning into an old, and very contented, Parisian: I feel as if I had stuck roots into the Parisian soil, and were likely to let them grow tangled and tenacious there.[2]

But such attachment would never do for James, and he soon felt the old pull back to England. Two months later he wrote:

> My last layers of resistance to a long-encroaching weariness and satiety with the French mind and its utterance has fallen from me like a garment. I have done with 'em, forever, and am turning English all over.[3]

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[1]Henry James, French Poets and Novelists (London, 1893), p. 220.

[2]Letters, I, 48. [3]Ibid., I, 51.

And so back to England and a fresh feeling of detachment. Only a year later he wrote:

> To tell the truth, I find myself a good deal more of a cosmopolitan (thanks to that combination of the continent and the U. S. A. which has formed my lot) than the average Briton of culture.[1]

But again this could not last; in June, 1879 he lamented that

> I am living here / London / too long to be an observer-- I am sinking into dull British acceptance and conformity.[2]

In 1884 he was again in Paris, writing with enthusiasm about the refreshment of his renewed acquaintance with Daudet, de Goncourt, and others.

> Seeing these people does me a world of good, and this intellectual vivacity and raffinement make an English mind seem like a sort of gluepot.[3]

But four years later James was again the dispassionate observer, neither British nor American, dealing with both nationalities in English settings:

> I have not the least hesitation in saying that I aspire to write in such a way that it would be impossible for an outsider to say whether I am an American writing about England or an Englishman writing about America (dealing as I do with both countries) ....[4]

The art of being an American European, the kind of disinterested European that James felt only an American could be, became less demanding as James matured. He succeeded admirably. His novels attest to the fact that, while his experience of Europe

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[1] Letters, I, 55.

[2] Ibid., I, 69. [3] Ibid., I, p. 103. [4] Ibid., I, p. 143.

was rich and deep, he did avoid the "superstitious valuation" which he saw spoiling the work of his fellow hungry exiles. He was, in fact, profoundly American. Only an American could portray Americans as James did, especially in his last three novels. Howells was one of the few of James's American contemporaries who recognized this. He credited James with planting "the seeds of an imaginative literature" which was as truly "native to our soil" as any yet known.[1] Howells, while dying, after writing his last letter, set to work on two papers on "The American James." Unfortunately, the papers were never finished; they were designed to argue that James, as Howell's fragmentary manuscript tells us, "was American to his heart's core to the day of his death.... He was never anything but American."[2] Many critics of the forties and fifties agree.

It is necessary to keep firmly in mind these principles of dispatriation in James because they throw light on the grey undercurrents of his thought regarding literature in democratic American society. He went into exile, not with a sense of bitterness but with a sense of duty to American letters. He felt sorely, as had Hawthorne, the need for tradition and history; but he sought them in Europe objectively, in a manner which only an American

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[1]Quoted by Christoph Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James, p. 152.

[2]Mildred Howells, ed., The Life in Letters of William Dean Howells (Garden City, 1928), II, 394-396.

could adopt. He was not torn between two cultures, for the position he sought and needed was precisely between them. While Whitman, "The solitary singer in the West," was praising the advantages of America's cultural isolation, James was seeking experience and literary soil in the opposite direction. His search was quite conscious. He saw and commended Hawthorne's effort to create in isolation from Europe, but he found the result wanting in fullness; he saw Story's attempt to leave America behind and to transplant himself completely in Europe, and he found the result still more disastrous; James decided to experiment with the literary sum of America plus Europe. For him, characteristically, one's country did not define one's subject, but one's relation to one's subject. He sought a point of observation and a source of literary nourishment which was out of the reach of a nationalist, be he American or European. And yet, James was convinced that it was the peculiar mission of the American, deprived necessarily of cultural depth at home, to reach this point. America's isolation could, as Whitman said, be turned to advantage; but whereas Whitman defined this advantage as the freedom to create new forms independent of Europe and the past, James defined it as the freedom to skim dispassionately the best from a Europe which is not our own.

Mr. T. S. Eliot, in the second year of his own "dispatriation," said:

> It is the final perfection, the consummation of an American to become, not an Englishman, but a European--something which no born European, no European of any nationality, can become.[1]

Henry James would surely have agreed.

II. EUROPE AND THE PAST

We have seen, in defining James's dispatriation, that he looked to Europe for the salvation of American culture and literature. He was convinced that it takes "an old civilization to set a novelist in motion," for he must feed upon matured customs, manners, usages, habits, forms.[2] Goethe, in the heat of liberal passion, had said,

> America, you fare much better
> Than this old continent of ours.
> No basalt rocks your land enfetter,
> No ruined towers.

But James, perceiving deeply the limitations put upon genius by the absence of an historical past, echoed the famous passage of Hawthorne's on the need for ruins:

> "No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles,

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[1] T. S. Eliot, "On Henry James," in F. W. Dupee, The Question of Henry James, pp. 123-4. (Reprinted from Little Review, August, 1918.)

[2] Letters, I, p. 72.

> nor manners, nor old country-houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages, nor ivied ruins; ...no great Universities nor public schools--no Oxford, nor Eaton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class--no Epsom nor Ascot!"[1]

The whole theme of the study of Hawthorne--which is at the same time an excellent study of James himself and his efforts to cope with American society as a writer--plays about this emptiness, this sterility, this bare newness of America. The moral of Hawthorne's career, said James,

> is that the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion.[2]

If Hawthorne could fight his way through by becoming a recluse and soaking himself in the narrow confines of New England Colonial history, he was far from ordinary and was forced to too great a sacrifice. More typical was Theobald, the tragic old American painter in the Madonna of the Future, who says of Florence:

> I owe her everything...it's only since I came here that I've really lived, intellectually and aesthetically speaking.[3]

What is it that the artist must seek in Europe? Why does he really need the ingredients which James so often reiterates?

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[1]Henry James, Hawthorne (London, 1879), p. 43. (English Men of Letters Series.)

[2]Ibid., p. 3.

[3]Henry James, Stories of Artists and Writers, ed. F. O. Matthiessen (New York, 1944), p. 22.

Whitman, of course, thought this kind of talk dandified rubbish; and James was not very specific. For one thing, he saw it as a search for wider scope and deeper penetration. History, custom, "a complexity of manners and types," these things are needed "to form a fund of suggestion for the novelist."[1] The past is needed to give range to the creative imagination; it must be "a palpable imaginable visitable past."[2] But the past must also be visitable because of its simple superiority to the present as a time of great art, great models, rapport between the artist and society. Here, for example, is the wildly idealistic Theobald describing a beautiful Florentine square on a quiet night:

> The present is sleeping; the past hovers about us like a dream made visible. Fancy the old Florentines strolling up in couples to pass judgment on the last performance of Michael, of Benvenuto! We should come in for a precious lesson if we might overhear what they say. The plainest burgher of them, in his cap and gown, had a taste in the matter. That was the prime of art, sir.... We live in the evening of time. We grope in the grey dusk, carrying each our little taper of selfish and painful wisdom....[3]

These days of illumination, however, are gone:

> Visions are rare; we've to look long to have them. But in meditation we may still cultivate the ideal; round it, smooth it, perfect it.[4]

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[1] Hawthorne, p. 43.

[2] Henry James, The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur (London, 1935), p. 164.

[3] Writers and Artists, p. 20.

[4] Ibid., p. 26.

Such meditation, of course, is almost impossible in an American city, with no visible reminders of that lost age of Raphael when life demanded art, when

> people's religious and aesthetic needs went arm in arm, and there was, as I may say, a demand for the Blessed Virgin, visible and adorable, which must have given firmness to the artist's hand....
>
> There's always a demand--that ineffable type is one of the eternal needs of man's heart; only pious souls long for it in silence, almost in shame.... How should it appear in this corrupt generation? It can't be made to order.... It can spring now only from the soil of passionate labour and culture.[1]

But Europe provides not only the added dimension of a vital, artistic past. Indeed, it is part of Theobald's tragedy that he merely waited for a similar vision, lost track of time, failed to see that his Madonna model had grown ugly and coarse: he ended with a canvas of dead paint. James was aware of the danger of a superstitious valuation of Europe's past as well. But he saw the Europe of the present, too, as (at least by comparison) a "state of civilization providing for 'art'"; and he assured his readers that in Roderick Hudson he fully intended "some more or less vivid antithesis" between the shallow, commercial, nervous, busy Northampton, Massachusetts of Roderick's youth and the free, natural geist of Rome.[2] Even though Roderick, like William Wetmore Story, is not "American" enough (in James's sense, not Whitman's)

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[1] Writers and Artists, p. 27.

[2] Art of the Novel, p. 8.

to survive on the richer diet, it is in Europe that he has his short period of great achievement. Leisure and artistic freedom seem to be the conditions of art present in modern Europe but lacking in America. Rowland tells Mary Garland that he is attracted to Europe because he is an idle man, "and in Europe both the burden and the obloquy of idleness are less heavy than here."[1] And Roderick, though driven to tragedy by his incapacity for freedom, sees the complete necessity of a "long rope." "If you want them to produce you must let them conceive."[2]

Maturity of customs and forms, depth of perspective, social complexity, a visitable past--such things are needed, James felt, to stir and feed the creative imagination. And even they are not ideally sufficient: for the artist so stirred and fed must have in addition artistic freedom, intellectual stimulation,[3] naturally granted leisure, and a general feeling that his life and work are _engagée_ with society. All this demanded contact with Europe. This was an implicit indictment of American Society.

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[1]Henry James, _Roderick Hudson_ (London: Macmillan, 1921), pp. 64-65.

[2]_Ibid._, p. 196.

[3]James, before leaving America, complained of a lack of intellectual life even in Cambridge, Mass. Although he had Howells and Norton, he had little else. By contrast, his first month in London put him in contact with Sir Leslie Stephen, Aubrey de Vere, Dickens' daughter, William Morris, D. G. Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Ruskin, Frederic Harrison, George Eliot, and Darwin. _Cf._ _Notes of a Son and Brother_, pp. 438-9, and Edel, _op. cit._, pp. 292-300.

III. AMERICAN CULTURE

James was also at times a direct and explicit critic of American society and culture. Using painter, writer, and sculptor interchangeably, he used the theme of the American artist's handicap recurrently in his fiction; it was also, as we have seen, the major theme of his Hawthorne. His insight into this problem was based upon a keen interest in and knowledge of the formative role of culture in literary work. Obviously, the American writer needed Europe because his own culture was deficient. But just what was this deficiency? James himself, in his second novel, asked the same question:

> It's a wretched business, this virtual quarrel of ours with our country, this everlasting impatience to get out of it. Is one's only safety in flight? This is an American day, an American landscape, an American atmosphere. It certainly has its merits, and someday when I am shivering with ague in classic Italy I shall accuse myself of having slighted them.[1]

James could elaborate this kind of point with an energy that surprises many of his critics. He felt strongly some of the vigor of the American spirit. Look at Marcellus Cockerel, that spirited American in "The Point of View." Europe seemed to him a great deal of humbug; vastness, freshness, and simple good nature in America more than make up for the lack of cathedrals and Titians. Europe seemed to him petty, provincial, part of the past. He knows about bad manners in America, but "an aristocracy is bad

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[1] Roderick Hudson, pp. 28-29.

manners organized." And America has no peasants, "of whom it takes so many to make a European noble." "We shall have all the Titians by and by," says Cockerel, "and we shall move over a few cathedrals."[1] There is not a trace of irony or satire in James's characterization of Cockerel, either. Now, obviously, this does not represent the whole of James's view of America. But it should be just as obvious that the cultural catalogue in Hawthorne does not represent the whole of James's view of America, either. It is quite possible that he believed both of them. At least he was aware of both positions, had feelings about each, and sensed the dramatic tension between them.

Still, keeping Marcellus Cockerel and James's admirable "innocents" in mind as part of his dispassionate ambivalence, we can find the definite points at which, in James's view, American culture falls short--especially as a milieu for the arts.

There is, of course, the absence of a rich "visitable past." Even Boston is busy with "a perpetual repudiation of the past."[2] History has had time to leave only a thin deposit in America; we very soon touch "the hard substratum of nature."[3] "A large juvenility is stamped upon the face of things."[4] And how can a

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[1]Henry James, American Novels and Stories, ed. F. O. Matthiessen (New York, 1947), pp. 329-332.

[2]Henry James, The American Scene, ed. W. H. Auden (New York, 1946), p. 53.

[3]Hawthorne, p. 12. [4]Ibid., p. 14.

writer characterize and satirize a people whose shifting movements can be placed against no backdrop of traditions? For James this was a real problem, one to which his international plots became a partial solution.

The depressing, cold sterility that James often found in the American scene is also due in part, he felt, to democratic "progress" and the ideology of the New World. "It is the huge democratic broom that has made the clearance and that one seems to see brandished in the empty sky."[1] Insofar as Henry James was politically anything, he was politically liberal. He never really shook himself free of his radical background and education. But his sense of art was in conflict with this; his instincts were strongly conservative because he was for civilization, and identified civilization with certain forms, manners, and traditions which conserve it. Again, the similarity to Arnold is striking.

Art is also stunted and discouraged by a peculiar democratic-American provincialism which demands conformity, discourages anything "different," and draws sustenance from the Puritan ethos. One cannot imagine James saying of any American city what he said of Paris: "There are facilities for every kind of habit and taste, and...everything is accepted and understood."[2] James seemed to feel deeply the kind of tyranny of the majority which

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[1] The American Scene, p. 55.

[2] Letters, I, 48.

Tocqueville had analyzed forty years earlier. And majority opinion in a barren, thin, isolated culture can be quite severe. Mr. Striker, the Northampton lawyer, immediately comes to mind. In his effort to discourage Roderick from going to Rome with Rowland Mallet, he is speaking for the Hudson family--but also for Northampton and New England, and perhaps even (as Matthew Arnold thought) for America. An antique statue is to him "an image of a pagan deity, with considerable dirt sticking to it, and no arms, no nose, no clothing." It strikes him as ridiculous that one should have to spend much time in such study, and Rowland's emphasis on the need for leisure and observation grates on him. Living models, he insists, should be as good in New England as in Rome, because "the same God made us."[1] We find the same prudish, tasteless Philistinism in the wealthy American collector, Mr. Leavenworth, for whom Roderick finds it impossible to work. And although James found this kind of aesthetic indifference in Europeans as well as in Americans--the London circle in The Tragic Muse, for example--there is a difference of degree; the sacrifice of alienation which the artist must make is not nearly so deep or broad for the English painter Nick Dormer as it is for his American counterpart.

We have already discussed James's quest in Europe for greater range of subject and feeling and imaginative stimulation. He did

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[1] Roderick Hudson, pp. 51-53.

not think the American scene adequate for a full, mature literature. Roderick Hudson is still a rather comic country bumpkin when he enthusiastically spouts, early in the book, that America is good enough for him; that he is "above all an advocate for American art"; and that, by the magic of Whitman's formula, America should automatically produce the greatest art because she has the biggest men and the biggest conceptions.[1] Roderick, of course, reverses this quickly in Europe and, unlike Rowland, becomes a provincial European. More to the point is the outcry of Theobald in the dark Florentine streets against his American heritage:

> We're the disinherited of Art! We're condemned to be superficial! We're excluded from the magic circle! The soil of American perception is a poor little barren artificial deposit! Yes, we're wedded to imperfection! An American, to excel, has just ten times as much to learn as a European! We lack the deeper sense! We have neither taste nor tact nor force! How <u>should</u> we have them? Our crude and garish climate, our silent past, our deafening present, the constant pressure about us of unlovely conditions are as void of all that nourishes and prompts and inspires the artist as my sad heart is void of bitterness in saying so! We poor aspirants must live in perpetual exile.[2]

And still more to the point is the answer of the young man telling the story--James's answer to himself:

> Nothing is so idle as to talk about our want of a nursing air, of a kindly soil, of opportunity, of inspiration, of the things that help. The only thing that helps is to do something fine. There is no law in our glorious constitution against that. Invent, create, achieve.[3]

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[1] <u>Roderick Hudson</u>, pp. 28-29.

[2] <u>Stories of Writers and Artists</u>, p. 21. [3] <u>Ibid</u>.

The artist must work in spite of the lack of range given him. James surely meant this seriously, but he conveyed little hope along with such affirmation. We must remember that Theobald died leaving a hideous old canvas of dead paint; and if Hawthorne proved to the young student James that "an American could be an artist, one of the finest, without 'going outside' about it,"[1] James also knew that his very narrowness as an artist and observer saved him, kept his demands gauged to his equipment, and made Europe unnecessary for him.[2] Range and observation must either be sacrificed or be ruled out by the artist's incapacity.

One of the major strictures on art which James perceived in America--one which Whitman celebrated as a beautiful freedom--was the absence of a self-conscious intellectual class.[3] "I haven't a creature to talk to," he complained two years before leaving America:

> How in Boston, when the evening arrives and I am tired of reading, and know it would be better to do something else, can I go to the theatre? I have tried it, ad nauseum. Likewise calling. Upon whom?[4]

After the first three years of his exile, while planning a return visit to America, he wrote William that he expected to find home

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[1] Notes of a Son and Brother, pp. 383-84.

[2] Hawthorne, pp. 164 ff.

[3] Cf. Fishman, op. cit., pp. 28-29.

[4] Edel, op. cit., p. 252.

"painfully and obstructively" uncongenial to literary work; what it needs is "a regal of intelligent and suggestive society."[1] Such a society is, of course, a major preoccupation in most of James's novels. He did not regard it as merely a great comfort to the writer; though it would surely be that, it was also a necessity. A writer, said James, has a definite need for "the comfort and inspiration of belonging to a class." The best talents are always those which are part of a group, a class; the solitary worker, the Hawthorne, is under a great handicap, and must encounter far more pain in working.[2] Indeed, Hawthorne is always an exception for James for precisely the same reason: he could even survive poor intellectual surroundings, because he was by nature a recluse with the strict limitations of an observer who asked little of his milieu.[3] The normal artist--the artist in The Lesson of the Master, The Tragic Muse, The Middle Years--cannot be conceived separated from such a group.

It is only to be expected that James would feel some hostility towards the predominant commercialism of American society. He noted with dismay the difficulty of launching a career not of the "practical order" and the awkwardness of "not belonging" in such a society.[4] He stated the donnée of his American Scene as

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[1] Letters, I, pp. 38-40.

[2] Hawthorne, p. 31.

[3] Ibid., pp. 28-29.

[4] Ibid., pp. 30-31.

> The great adventure of a society reaching out into the apparent void for the amenities, the consummations, after having so earnestly gathered in the preparations and necessities.[1]

In the same book he criticized the wealthy classes in America for affirming their wealth without affirming anything else, for "having nothing to do with continuity, responsibility, transmission...."[2] Striker may again be used to stand for the commerce-driven middle-class American, for he describes himself as

> a practical old boy, content to follow an honorable profession in a free country. I didn't go to any part of Europe to learn my business; no one took me by the hand....[3]

If James occasionally fell into near-clichés, in the manner of Martin Chuzzlewit, in these characterizations, he could also be serious; he could also create a Mary Garland, and put her sweet New England innocence in the richness of Rome until she finds that beauty

> penetrates to one's soul and lodges there and keeps saying that man wasn't made, as we think at home, to struggle so much and miss so much...[4]

But in total effect James was quite mild as a critic of commercialism. R. P. Blackmur is right in noting that James had some of Tocqueville's awareness of the problem of the "trade of literature"; but he is also right in noting that this was, for James, secondary to the more universal issues confronting the

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[1] The American Scene, p. 12. [2] Ibid., p. 11.

[3] Roderick Hudson, p. 54. [4] Ibid., p. 401.

individual and the artist.[1] He preferred, like his own Christopher Newman in The American, to leave commerce quite behind and seek a thinner, finer atmosphere. James Whistler's leaving his family's vast railroad interests comes to mind as a parallel.

James was not really very optimistic about the chances for literature in democratic American society. But he was not entirely pessimistic, either. Critics in the twenties assumed that James's Hawthorne was little more than an attempt to document the theory that the artist in America is doomed. But James's diagnosis of Hawthorne did not lead him to this conclusion. He was not blinded to some of the advantages given the American artist. He expected, for example, an unnatural degree of devotion to great art; the young narrator in The Madonna of the Future has no trouble in recognizing Theobald as an American, for "the very heat of his worship was a mark of conversion."[2] But this advantage too easily becomes a snare; Theobald, lacking the ease and skill which are born of time, dies in disappointment, tragically searching for his "other half"; and Story, too, James reminds us, was a devout worshiper of art. Intensity of devotion is not enough.

The American artist is not doomed to failure, but he is doomed by his "complex fate" as an American to hard work. The

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[1] R. P. Blackmur, "In the Country of the Blue," in F. W. Dupee, The Question of Henry James, pp. 202-221.

[2] Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 29.

absence of a visitable past, of a tolerant social attitude towards art, and of a self-conscious intellectual class is a real barrier. The barrier is raised higher by other factors: the Puritan heritage, commercialism, the demand for rigid social conformity, the lack of social complexity, the lack of range and of interesting subject-matter.[1] James quietly but flatly rejected the complacent optimism of Whitman. The occasional "sports" in American art, like Hawthorne, who was sprung "out of the Salem puddles, flower-like,"[2] too often will not have the strength or nourishment to blossom fully and to endure. The cultural medium in America is too thin to cultivate the arts easily and naturally. But "deep, dark old Europe" can do much to save the American artist--if he is not beguiled and overwhelmed by her, if he can "use" her with the innocent detachment and disinterestedness that only an American can achieve.

American art--distinctive American art--is not impossible. But it must be tailored to the many deficiencies and the few great advantages that America offers her artists.

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[1]James's fears about the thinness of subject-matter in America can be found not only in his letters and his more important critical studies, but also in some of his early reviews of American novels. Reviewing Bayard Taylor's tragedy of Mormonism, The Prophet, James commended the author for having "secured for a hero a veritable prophet, with the bloom not yet rubbed off by literature." But Taylor was scraping the bottom of the barrel. "It is very well to wish to poetize common things, but...one must choose. There are things inherently vulgar... Mormonism is one of these." [North American Review, CXXX (Jan., 1875), 189, 193.]

[2]Hawthorne, p. 40. Cf. also Roderick Hudson, p. 17.

IV. WRITER AND PUBLIC

Whitman, combining the bardic tradition with democratic (almost Tupper-like) sentiment, thought of the writer as a representative of the people. He looked with eagerness towards "democratic art." Here too, Whitman and James are at loggerheads. For James, art was art--an intensely serious thing with its own eternal standards. Although his early reviews in the Nation and the North American Review (1864-66) show a deep concern for the reader of fiction and decree that for this reason everything must be credible and the novelist must convey and reveal rather than describe,[1] and although he tried to win a wider audience with such attempts as the drama and the "pattern in the carpet" prefaces to the New York edition,[2] he refused to be circumscribed by public taste. Nick Dormer, having resigned his seat in Parliament (and a considerable fortune) for art, tells Gabriel Nash: "You rescued me; you converted me from a representative into an example--that's a shade better."[3] For Henry James, in the confines of the world of art, there was more than a shade of difference.

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[1]Edel, op. cit., pp. 214-215.

[2]These prefaces are in reality a protest against inattentive reading; their performance brings Hugh Verecker of The Pattern in the Carpet close to the realm of autobiography. Cf. Leon Edel, The Prefaces of Henry James (Paris, 1931), pp. 13-16.

[3]Henry James, The Tragic Muse (London, 1921), II, 353.

In fact, James could show at times an actual disgust for the notion of a popular culture. Gabriel Nash's description of a modern audience--too lengthy to quote in full--is a small classic in its kind:

> ...the omnium gatherum of the population of a big commercial city at the hour of the day when their taste is at its lowest, flocking out of hideous hotels and restaurants, gorged with food, stultified with buying and selling and with all the other sordid preoccupations of the age, squeezed together in a sweltering mass, disappointed in their seats, timing the author, timing the actor, wishing to get their money back on the spot--all before eleven o'clock. Fancy putting the exquisite before such a tribunal as that![1]

Mark Ambient, the tragic writer of The Author of Beltraffio whose story was suggested to James by incidents in the life of Symonds, is ruined by the standards of such an audience as they are expressed by his own wife. His scorn passes around and beneath her to a general condition:

> There's a hatred of art, there's a hatred of literature--I mean of the genuine kinds. Oh the shams--those they'll swallow by the bucket![2]

Like Mark Ambient, Neil Paraday (the writer in The Death of the Lion) is driven to destruction by his audience. Their superficial and unenlightened adulation harms as much as does any scorn, for they keep him from his work, put him on exhibition, and finally leave him to die in the guest-room of his patroness's home while

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[1]The Tragic Muse, I, 58-59.

[2]Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 78.

they switch their attention in the spacious rooms below to a pair of rival literary sex-mongers, each of whom writes as a member of his opposite sex. And James reached the height of disgust, rather surprisingly, in The Madonna of the Future, that gripping tale which seems bent on pointing a very different moral, viz., the futility of so idealizing art that it cannot be brought to actual life. But James, in this tale, pointed to an even worse fate in the opposite extreme, the extreme of cynical talent at work without an ideal, with nothing to stir it but a consuming public. His symbol is the vulgar Italian contriver of obscene cat-and-monkey figurines, and with him he succeeds in casting over the whole tale the suggestion of what Matthiessen has called "the horror of spiritual death."

James does not, however, allow this question of mass culture to draw him too far from his primary concern with the creation of art. His dealings with the question are more frequently light than tragic, and often serve to remind us, as Constance Rourke has done in her essay on The American,[1] that James had exquisite powers as a humorist. His Greville Fane is a piece of pretty fencing showing a surprising warmth and love for a simply deluded woman novelist who churns out scores of emotional, slick, sensational books of great popularity while suffering the jeers and the condescension of her worthless children--a snobbish daughter

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[1]The essay is re-printed in F. W. Dupee, The Question of Henry James.

and a perverse son. But the masterpiece of this school is The Next Time--a swift-moving leg-pull with flashes of brilliant narrative humor. In this tale a promising young novelist, Ray Limbert, struggles heroically to make sufficient money to allow him to marry. His books have been acclaimed, but do not sell. Meanwhile his sister-in-law, Jane Highmore, having acquired a small fortune by writing eighty pot-boilers, "yearned to be, like Limbert, but of course only once, an exquisite failure."[1] Limbert works furiously at writing down to the public:

> I must cultivate the market--it's a science like another; I must go in for an infernal cunning.... I haven't been obvious--I must be obvious. I haven't been popular--I must be popular.[2]

But he simply cannot write poorly enough; with the help of his friends he desperately seeks to know "why the note he strained every chord to pitch for common ears should invariably insist upon addressing itself to the angels."[3] He is discharged from the editorship of a new magazine--not for diabolically creating a market for his "changed manner" by means of a cheaply popular serial at the publisher's expense, but for being (in the publisher's estimation) still too highbrow. With amusing persistence he moves his sights still lower; when the book comes out, his friends are astonished: it is "an unscrupulous, an unsparing, a shameless merciless masterpiece"[4]--which of course defeats his purpose.

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[1] Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 245.

[2] Ibid., p. 262. [3] Ibid., p. 276. [4] Ibid., p. 266.

His friends continue to encourage him, meanwhile taking secret solace in the fact that he is writing brilliant books. Jane Highmore's attempt goes dead ("How can there be anything but the same old faithful rush for it?"[1] comments the narrator); Ray Limbert, poor and sick, a "failure," loses the memory of the ordeal and at the end writes (without finishing) a book as he wishes to write; and the narrator points the nicely inverted moral: "You can't make a sow's ear of a silk purse! ... It takes more than trying--it comes by grace."[2]

James used, then, both comedy and tragedy to express his feelings about popular culture and its bearing on art. At first glance it is surprising that he did not have more to say. There are very few personal utterances in the letters and notebooks directed against mass culture[3]--perhaps fewer than can be found in Whitman. But this is not quite so surprising if we remember James's high valuation of the creative life as a life of detachment, devotion, dedication to ideal beauty. To such a writer the reading public can scarcely matter; his omission of interest is in itself a condemnation of mass standards of judgment.

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[1] Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 247.

[2] Ibid., p. 272.

[3] But Cf. his complaint to Howells about "trying to write anything decent or serious for a public so absolutely idiotic"; and his assertion to William that "one has always a 'public' enough if one has an audible vibration--even if it should only come from one's self." (Letters, I, 104-5, 175.)

V. THE RELIGIOUS PRACTICE OF ART

James did not share Whitman's views on mass culture because he did not share his views on art. While both of them were "realists," they meant quite different things by "realism." Whitman was an advocate of passionate association of the artist with his scene; but James was an advocate of objective study and creation, of dispassionate separation from his scene. Neither of them saw art as the mere celebration of life, but Whitman created a reality by symbolic identity with his materials; James, on the other hand, molded his creation out of a particular point of view. Dencombe, the old writer in The Middle Years, tells the young doctor who has become his "first and only chance,"

> We work in the dark--we do what we can--we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art.[1]

The artist was, for James, completely dedicated--dedicated not to society but to art, to beauty.

> To live in the world of creation--to get into it and stay in it--to frequent it and haunt it--to think intensely and fruitfully--to wish combinations and inspirations into being...--this is the only thing.[2]

The artist's dedication makes of him, as Blackmur says, the man (saints excepted) most totally deprived. James's portrait of him is always the portrait of a failure: for otherwise it would

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[1] Writers and Artists, p. 210.

[2] Henry James, Notebooks, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and K. Murdock (New York, 1947), p. x.

merely be that of a man.[1]

This separation of art and life ("life" naturalistically defined) was anathema to Whitman and creed to James. This is not to say that James thought it ideal; he thought it, rather, an almost intolerable situation. In a better age--the great age of Florence as imagined by Theobald, for example--the dichotomy would not exist. But he seemed to regard it as a perceptible fact that life had exiled beauty clean out of it, making necessary its religious pursuit by the devout artist. The awareness of this fact made him, in his fiction, much more than an historian of manners; he was also "a trenchant idealistic critic of life from the aesthetic point of view."[2] The contention between him and Whitman is in part the conflict between a dualistic aesthetic idealism and a monistic pantheism. Whitman found nothing more beautiful than his own body and the green grass; James had to look beyond the actual, like his own Mark Ambient:

> My dear fellow, if you could see the surface I dream of as compared with the one with which I've to content myself. Life's really too short for art--one hasn't time to make one's shell ideally hard.[3]

The entire gallery of artists in James's fiction are marked with this devotion to art--and they all find it necessary to sacrifice

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[1] Blackmur, op. cit., p. 220.

[2] Stuart P. Sherman, "The Aesthetic Idealism of Henry James," in F. W. Dupee (ed.), The Question of Henry James, p. 105.

[3] Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 76.

something of life. They must work--as Mark Ambient saw too late--alone. They must work, not to please, but to capture the idea: poor Theobald, despite his tragic delusion, is a consistent Jamesian artist when he proves his conscientiousness with the statement, "I've never sold a picture!"[1] Neil Paraday (The Death of the Lion) is doomed from the moment life becomes mixed up with art. In The Lesson of the Master, the cruel lesson is obvious from the beginning. When Paul Overt objects,

> What a false position, what a condemnation of the artist, that he's a mere disenfranchised monk and can produce his effect only by giving up personal happiness. What an arraignment of art!

the Master, "the great misguided novelist," Henry St. George, can only answer:

> Ah, you don't imagine by chance that I'm defending art? 'Arraignment'--I should think so! ... Most assuredly is the artist in a false position![2]

James put most of his artists through the great temptation: he had them confronted with life, and faced with the cruel necessity of choosing between it and art. Even Rowland, who is used mainly as Roderick's go-between, seeking the narrow ridge between, is tempted during his own task of bringing Roderick to the thin, beautiful world of art. As he walks through moonlit Northampton, Massachusetts he feels he

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[1] Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 24.

[2] Ibid., p. 140.

> could almost have believed that the happiest lot for any man was to make the most of life in some such tranquil spot as that. Here were kindness, comfort, safety, the warning voice of duty, the perfect absence of temptation....[1]

The temptation, the problem, the very dualism cannot be understood by those whose thought and art represent the other half of the great American dialogue, those who are celebrants of a new life in a New World. Nor could its intensity always be understood by conservative Europeans, still accustomed to thinking of art and life as of one piece.

VI. ART AND CRAFT

There is a final point upon which these two traditions represented by Whitman and James stand far apart: it can be denominated the conscious concern with the craft of literature.

Whitman, in his rejection of all that was feudal, conventional, artificial, and "unnatural," and in his eagerness to blaze a new trail for a completely new literature, hoped to make all questions of "style" and "form" irrelevant and obsolete. If this is "typically American," it is only half of the picture: for as Matthiessen has pointed out, the opposite is also typical. Writers like Poe and James and Eliot have reacted to this neglect with an almost compulsive obsession for form.

James McNeil Whistler, that other great American exile of

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[1] Roderick Hudson, p. 58.

the latter part of the nineteenth century, is an interesting parallel to James. In flight from the same America, driven by the same hunger (though satisfying it in a more Bohemian manner), insisting that "there is no nationality in painting" and that art must "appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, such as devotion, pity, love, patriotism, and the like,"[1] Whistler's concern is with harmony, design, form. Whistler, who claimed "no nationality," and who vigorously attacked the aestheticism of his English contemporaries in The Gentle Art of Making Enemies, was really giving strong utterance to the aesthetic and conservative side of the distinctly American dialogue:

> My picture of a Harmony in Grey and Gold is an illustration of my meaning--a snow scene with a single black figure and a lighted tavern. I care nothing for the past, present or future of the black figure, placed there because the black was wanted at that spot. All that I know is that my combination of grey and gold is the basis of the picture. Now this is precisely what my friends cannot grasp. They say, "Why not call it 'Trotty Veck,' and sell it for a round harmony of golden guineas?"[2]

It sounds like something out of the fiction of Henry James.

James grew into the concern for craft very early. At twenty-one, when he was writing reviews for the North American Review, he was

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[1]Quoted by Matthew Josephson, Portrait of the Artist as an American, p. 60.

[2]Quoted by Joseph Pennell and Elizabeth Pennell, The Life of James McNeil Whistler (Philadelphia, 1911), p. 116.

> approaching fiction more consciously and with greater deliberation than any American novelist before him; the need to put the house of fiction in order and the need for precept, canon, codification, is there and clearly in evidence. Later it was to be expressed in a series of tales about misunderstood writers, all of them groping for an ideal world, a great good place in which art could flourish....[1]

Part of James's concern had still deeper roots. He was interested, throughout his life, in the whole problem of appearance versus reality. For an American, this was natural; for America is built largely upon the "American dream" in a way in which no other society is built upon a dream. But the problem for the artist is acute, and becomes a technical problem--unless he is content, like Whitman, to super-impose the dream upon the actual. James rejected this; but, as his notebooks clearly demonstrate, he could at first perceive no more of that which lies beneath appearance than any of us. His notebooks, says Matthiessen, give us nothing but "a picture of the empty social world of the tourist."[2] To mold such simple realistic observation into great literature requires the utmost literary skill. He had to be a craftsman in order to bridge the gap between what Matthiessen calls the "apparent emptiness of experience and what he could make of it."[3] Mr. V. S. Pritchett, in an unpublished play on

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[1]Edel, The Untried Years, p. 204.

[2]F. O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (New York, 1946), p. 2.

[3]Ibid., p. 4.

James,[1] notes a similar oddity: James is concerned, not with experience, but with the result, the effect of experience. Art and life are separate--even for a realist. The artist must transform, re-create; he cannot simply copy. This is the point of James's The Real Thing: Major and Mrs. Monarch, serving as artist's models, can offer "the real thing" in ladies and gentlemen; but the artist's work becomes stiff; the real thing is less precious than the unreal;[2] the cockney girl and the Italian servant-boy, who pose as gentry, inspire him as the "real thing" cannot. It is technique, craft that defines art.

James's demand and need for conscious craft can be thus accounted for. That he was, indeed, a great craftsman cannot and need not here be proved. He required, mainly, the power of evoking the tone of things instead of describing them in discursive language. It is generally agreed--especially among the admiring poets of our own day--that he succeeded.[3]

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[1]Broadcast on the B.B.C. Third Programme on January 22, 1956.

[2]Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 191.

[3]O'Connor, op. cit., pp. 95-97.

PART IV:

Victorians and the Orientation of American Literature

CHAPTER NINE

VICTORIAN PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE

What kind of mind was it that, beginning at mid-century, tried to judge American culture while American literature struggled to be born?

This question has been answered with frequency, at great length, in many ways by many writers, with at least some degree of unanimity. The major characteristics of the mind and the age are already well enough known. This short chapter sets out only to fill in details which are sometimes overlooked, especially as they reveal the Victorian mind in relation to America and to the questions about culture which America must have suggested to the nineteenth century. A fuller picture of the Victorian mind will unfold in the following chapters--for a major purpose of this dissertation is to shed light on Victorian criticism.

For one thing, the Victorian mind was a mind of quality, a mind of intellectual worth. Historian G. M. Young tells us that he has won the consent of the Sorbonne to the statement that there are two great ages of human intellect--the age of Pericles and the age of Victoria. This in spite of the many reminders we have of its excessive shoddiness and mediocrity. The sheer expansiveness of intellect, the scope of its activity, may have had as much to do with this as did cultural maturity. George

Saintsbury made some such point about the literary criticism of the age. "Although there certainly has been more bad criticism written in the nineteenth century than in any previous one,--probably more than in all previous centuries put together," he wrote, "it is quite certain that no period can show so much that is good."[1]

I.

That the Victorian age was an age of political, social, philosophical, and religious upheaval is obvious enough. What may not be so obvious is the fact that this constant stirring of the waters set Britons to looking not only behind and ahead, to past and future, but also, like their American cousins, to looking in two directions, East and West. Through all the turbulent internal change, many a mind sought stability from the continent. Except for Carlyle and the transcendentalists, who looked to Germany, the European point of focus was generally France. But Matthew Arnold, for one, seems to have been deliberately attempting to divert the gaze of his countryman from America to France;[2] and Charles Kingsley, we learn from his letters,[3] advocated the

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[1]George Saintsbury, A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1949), III, p. 421.

[2]See below, p. 176.

[3]Letters and Memoirs (London, 1887), II, 134, 228-9. Cf. also F. W. Maitland, The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen (London, 1906), 175-7.

founding at Cambridge of a lectureship on the United States only because he thought it might help to ward off growing "Americanization." Many of the Victorians, living in an age of change and reform and "progress" and fat promise, turned their eyes hopefully or apprehensively towards the West and the new world. So something of the same bifurcation of society which marked America was setting in in England; there, too, men stood uncertainly and looked both East and West.

This is perhaps not so obvious partly because we have become accustomed to thinking of the Victorian age, especially after 1850, in terms of such words as democracy, science, optimism, progress, and so forth. But, as Walter E. Houghton has recently shown in his The Victorian Frame of Mind,[1] for the Victorians themselves the key word was transition. They felt that their age marked some kind of significant change from past to future. Transition, of course, suggests uncertainty and re-examination. It is the important word especially for Arnold, John Stuart Mill, and Bulwer Lytton; but the same word is used to characterize the age by Prince Albert, Carlyle, Disraeli, Frederic Harrison, Harriet Martineau, John Morley, William Morris, Herbert Spencer, John Addington Symonds, and Tennyson.

That sense of transition gave to the Victorian mind its characteristic multiplicity and variety--a multiplicity and

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[1] New Haven, 1957.

variety which is reflected alike in Victorian customs, in literary style, in Victorian beliefs. It is an age of heterogeneity. But the Victorians themselves are our best reminders that societies are not content with unrest, with a sense of transition, with multiplicity and heterogeneity. The impulse towards settled belief, towards an homogenous society, was hard at work, moving minds and men as different as Macaulay, Carlyle, Bright, Frederic Harrison, and Arnold. And because the transition was in part a transition towards liberal democracy and its vaguely defined institutions, it was inevitable that the Victorians should study America. English and European culture had always been divided into aristocratic culture and folk culture; the United States, as Arnold pointed out, skipped the aristocratic. Its culture was naturally homogenous. Whether with mockery or respect or fear or longing or simple studious interest, the Victorians looked at American homogeneity as an alternative to their own unsettled, shifting, heterogeneous society.

Then too, the English knew, as Tocqueville knew, that the democratic experiment had gone further in America than anywhere in Europe. Whatever one's hopes or fears about democracy and the future might be, he had to reckon with the United States. Tocqueville was speaking not just for himself but for European thought when he noted that in Europe

> the democratic revolution has been effected only in the material parts of society, without the concomitant change in laws, ideas, customs, and manners.... We have obtained a democracy [in France], but without

> the conditions which lessen its vices and render its natural advantages more prominent; and although we already perceive the evils it brings, we are ignorant of the benefits it may confer.[1]

This was of greater concern to the English than to anyone else; after all, the culture of growing America was a direct off-shoot of a native British liberal tradition. It is not at all unfair to say that America was shaped essentially by Locke, Adam Smith, Blackstone, Newton, and Thomas Paine.[2] Now the strange bird, bred in England, was coming home to roost. In the political and cultural unrest and turmoil of the Victorian age, it was not likely that this would be forgotten. British intellectuals of all parties felt that they could gauge the British future, the cultural future as well as the political future, by getting to know and to understand America. John Bright, writing to Motley in 1863,[3] expresses the feeling well:

> The argument could not be avoided, if Englishmen west of the Atlantic could prosper without crown, without Lords, without Church, without a great territorial class with feudal privileges...how long will Englishmen in England continue to think these things necessary for them?

So, with apprehensive horror or with utopian hope, the

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[1] Democracy in America, p. 8.

[2] "Among the writings of English and continental thinkers who helped give shape to American culture, none have been more pivotal than those of Sir Isaac Newton, John Locke, Charles de Secondat de Montisquieu, Sir William Blackstone, and Adam Smith." R. E. Spiller, et al., Lit. Hist. United States, III, 94.

[3] John L. Motley, Correspondence, ed. B. W. Curtis (New York, 1889), II, 120.

Victorians attempted their estimates of their own strange, wild offspring in America. The seriousness of their interest is reflected partly in the increasing number of articles on America and reviews of American books towards the end of the century. But because they too were in search of orientation and were torn between an institutionalized past and a vague future, we must not expect an abundance of objectivity in their estimates. They were standing outside the picture, so to speak, and could see it as a whole; undoubtedly they could recognize the split character of American culture more readily than the Americans could; but they were seldom disinterested, mildly curious spectators. Partisan feeling often ran strong, as we shall see, and this often limited the value of the assessments made of Whitman, James, or the American scene in general.

II.

What kinds of theories of literature were in the Victorian mind as it read the Americans? Again, the Victorians were not unprepared for the problems characteristic of American literature at this time. The same forces and movements were operating in each country. Indeed, the realistic movement (to take one example) was working its way through the whole of Western civilization, and through all of the arts. Courbet's first exhibition was in 1855, the year of Whitman's Leaves of Grass: and it was Courbet who said, "Faire des vers, c'est malhonnet; parler

autrement que tout le monde, c'est poser pour l'aristocrate."[1] Flaubert's Madame Bovary appeared in the following year.

Not only realism, but also naturalism, socio-realistic propagandism, the art-for-art's-sake reaction to didacticism--all these are ingredients of the nineteenth century as a whole, Victorian Britain outstandingly included. Each theory seemed to agree that literature was at least some kind of expression. Already in the previous century the German romanticists had introduced the idea that literature should be an expression of the national spirit, symbolizing the inner life of a nation. The idea developed most rapidly in Russia (Belinsky and Chernyshevsky demanding the social relevance of literature, and Dimitri Pisarev reducing aesthetics to psychology and hygiene--"every healthy and normal person is beautiful");[2] but it soon became part of Victorianism as well, and, under the surveillance of the newly powerful middle classes, fostered a view of literature which was anti-aesthetic and didactic, and which insisted that art is personal expression.

The influence of Sainte-Beuve on the Victorians must not be overlooked. It is under his influence that expression came to mean self-expression, personal revelation. Imagine the critical

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[1]Emile Gros-Kost, Courbet, Souvenirs Intimes (Paris: Derveaux, 1880), p. 31.

[2]William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History (New York, 1957), p. 461.

standards of the following paragraph (F. J. Furnivall, discussing Browning's Introductory Essay to the Shelley letters) being applied to the novels of Henry James:

> The interest lay in the fact that Browning's utterances here are his, and not those of any one of the "so many imaginary persons," behind whom he so often insists on hiding himself, and whose necks I, for one, should continually like to wring, whose bodies I would fain kick out of the way, in order to get face to face with the poet himself, and hear his own voice speaking his own thoughts, man to man, soul to soul. Straight speaking, straight hitting, suit me best.[1]

Of equal importance is the conviction, fairly current in Victorian society, that literature, if it be genuine, will and must get its message across to the ordinary reader. It is the age of Tupper as well as of Browning's Sordello. This too is part of the nineteenth century. Tolstoy, when he tells us that art is for "a country peasant of unperverted taste,"[2] sounds very much like Whitman or Robert Buchanan. It is all part of the westward gaze, the new age of the ordinary man. And this attitude goes on to insist, of course, that literature be didactic. "All great art and literature," wrote Bernard Shaw, "is propaganda." Tolstoy's didactic criticism of Shakespeare--

> the lowest, most vulgar view of life, which despises the crowd, that is to say, the working classes; and

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[1] Browning Society Papers (London, 1881), no. 1.

[2] Leo Tolstoy, What is Art? (London, 1932), p. 221. In chapter XII Tolstoy sweeps away almost the whole tradition of Western art, including Dante, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, and Bach.

> repudiates not only religious, but even any humanitarian, efforts directed toward the alteration of the existing order of society[1] --

has numerous parallels in Victorian criticism, as we shall see. It all sounds American, and in a sense it is; but it is also part of the mind of the Victorians and of the Europeans in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The demands of a large, powerful, newly-educated middle class audience left a deep imprint on Victorian literary criticism. Utilitarianism was openly hostile to literature, equating, as Bentham had, poetry with push-pin; the middle classes demanded usefulness, and in most literature they found none. Evangelicalism was likewise hostile. Often the only salvation of literature, outside of narrowly utilitarian or evangelical didacticism, lay in the theory that the writer's legitimate function was that of a prophet. Carlyle had pronounced the idea forcefully in his On Heroes; if it was not already a popular theory when Carlyle defended it, it soon became one. It was one answer to Macaulay's complacent observation in his essay on Milton that language in a middle class society would become more general, that we would have from now on "better theories and worse poems." The poet could survive by taking up his old mantle as a bard, enunciating but also elevating and purifying public opinion. Walt Whitman in America is an obvious manifestation of this middle class return

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[1] Leo Tolstoy, "Shakespeare and the Drama," in A. Maude, ed., Tolstoy on Art (Boston, 1924), p. 437.

to the old bardic tradition. The Victorian public and a number of Victorian critics insisted upon this prophetic role of the writer. The result was that much poetry and fiction and essay in the age became bardic in tone and purpose; but there was another result: the wedge between writer and public was driven in deeper, and art was forced to various degrees of isolation. While Arnold was expressing the romantic loneliness of "Empedocles on Etna" and the spiritual aridity of "Dover Beach," while Browning was probing individual motive and the lover or artist who cannot communicate, while even Tennyson was preoccupied with doubt and with themes of betrayal and separation, the public and many of the critics went on clamoring for writers who would inspire the people by chanting mightily the values and the optimism of the new race.

Such binding of the artist to the middle classes (or in some cases to the masses) and to utilitarian purpose had another result: an art-for-art's sake school which plays its part in the complex of Victorian criticism. Art had always been, in some sense, for its own sake; but the nineteenth century characteristically questioned and modified this; the didacticism and utilitarianism of the age unintentionally hurried along the aesthetic movement as a reaction. Oscar Wilde became the right counter to Leo Tolstoy: Wilde complained of "the overimportance assigned to character," uncouthness and vulgarity, and "realism," in the plays of Shakespeare.[1]

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[1]Oscar Wilde, Intentions (New York, 1894), p. 21.

This survey of the forces at work in Victorian literature and Victorian criticism suggests certain expectations. The poetic theories which sought personal revelation and social teaching in literature would, of course, tend to favor the Redskin movement in America. To a lesser degree, and for different reasons, the rhapsodic-spasmodic school of criticism (Carlyle usually comes first to mind) would have natural inclinations towards the same movement. But there were also cultural conservatives--it is tempting to say cultural conservationists--who feared that too much of the cultural tradition was being sacrificed. By nature these conservatives were suspicious of Whitman; by nature neo-classical idealists like Arnold would hope for the success of the "Europhile" movement in America; and by nature the aesthetic critics would embrace Henry James and examine Whitman cautiously, trying to separate the daring artist from bardic mask. But the point is, Whitman and James and the whole problem of American cultural orientation fit significantly into the context of Victorian criticism.

III.

One final comment on the Victorian mind: it had a clear advantage for understanding the implications of the American problem. Drawn to America as a profitable subject, a subject that should have aided them in seeing themselves and their culture more clearly, Victorian men of letters were still intimately in touch with an older civilization. They could easily assume a position

halfway between East and West. They knew better than the Americans what it meant to have a tradition--and therefore something of what it meant to overthrow one. They understood more clearly the meaning of the nineteenth century conflict between old and new sets of values--because they were closer to the old ones. They had rich materials for the discussion of the conditions necessary to the growth of literature.

In summary, these are the significant, and sometimes overlooked, characteristics of the Victorians from mid-century on: intellectual vigor, a recognition of their age as an age of transition, an impatience with their own heterogeneity, a tendency to look to either the British past, the continent, or the New World for guidance into the future, a feeling that they had something at stake in the fate of American culture and American affairs, and an intellectual and literary atmosphere which was analogous enough to afford understanding of American forces and ideas, and yet was distinct enough in depth and complexity to shed significant light upon them.

CHAPTER TEN

IN GENERAL: WHITMAN AND JAMES IN BRITAIN

I.

Whitman's avant garde exploration of a new liberal bent for literature to match the social and scientific progress of the modern world aroused little comment in his own country--simply because Whitman in general was largely ignored. It was in Britain that he was first taken seriously; it was here that his ideas about literature and society met their first and only test in the nineteenth century.

The sheer bulk of the attention paid him in Britain is itself astounding. There can be no argument with John Addington Symonds' statement, a year after Whitman's death, that "Hitherto he has won more respect from persons of culture in Great Britain than from the divine average of the States."[1] And Whitman was quite aware of his Old World audience. As early as 1862, he wrote the following to his unofficial London agent, Moncure Conway:

> Indeed, my dear friend, I may here confess to you that to be accepted by these young men of England, and treated with highest courtesy and even honor, touches me deeply. In my own country, so far--from the press, and from authoritative quarters, I have

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[1]John Addington Symonds, Walt Whitman: A Study (London, 1893), p. 124.

> received but one long tirade of impudence, mockery, and scurrilous jeers. Only since the English recognition have the skies here lighted up a little.[1]

The history of the affair is spectacular enough to have merited at least one full-length study, that of Professor Harold Blodgett. Among Whitman's defenders in Britain can be found such names as W. M. Rossetti, Swinburne, Robert Louis Stevenson, J. A. Symonds, Edward Dowden, George Saintsbury, Professor Nettleship, and Robert Buchanan. Some of these, and others, collected almost £ 160 for Whitman's support in 1886.[2] His fame had its curious facets--such as the formation of a "Labour church" in Birmingham, having for its service readings from Walt Whitman, alternating with hymns and the Lord's Prayer.[3] W. M. Rossetti and Ann Gilchrist seriously debated by correspondence whether Whitman might not be "far more closely akin to Christ than to either Homer or Shakespeare"; and they agreed that these four names must certainly be grouped together.[4] Symonds placed Leaves of Grass above the writings of Plato and Goethe.[5] Even the hostile Saturday Review had to admit Whitman's importance, and felt constrained to devote six articles to him in his own lifetime.

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[1] CPSP, pp. 969-970.

[2] W. M. Rossetti, Letters...Concerning Whitman, Blake, and Shelley, ed. by Clarence Gohdes and P. F. Baum (Durham, 1934), Appendix B, p. 185.

[3] Blodgett, op. cit., p. 4.

[4] W. M. Rossetti, op. cit., pp. 63-64.

[5] Blodgett, op. cit., p. 1.

W. M. Rossetti and Robert Buchanan--who had little else in common--each sent a letter to President Grover Cleveland, pleading that Whitman be given a government pension.[1]

But some of the criticism in Britain was severe, especially in the earlier years. Sir Henry Maine, writing in the Saturday Review, vigorously attacked the 1855 edition and suggested that anyone who might happen to come into possession of a copy would do well to burn it.[2] Swinburne, who was initially one of the warmest of Whitman's admirers, later turned on him one of his hottest streams of invective in an essay called "Whitmania."[3] The Literary Gazette called Whitman of all writers "the most silly, the most blasphemous, and the most disquieting."[4] Professor Gohdes has found that, of ten anthologies of poetry appearing between 1863 and 1892 which included American authors, only two contain selections from Whitman.[5]

The point is not that Whitman was universally damned or praised; it is rather that he was widely discussed.

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[1]Buchanan's letter is preserved in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Both letters are re-printed in Appendix A, W. M. Rossetti, op. cit., pp. 181-183.

[2]Saturday Review, I (March 15, 1856), 394.

[3]This piece first appeared in the Fortnightly Review in 1887. Swinburne later included it in his Studies in Prose and Poetry (London, 1894).

[4]Literary Gazette, V (July 7, 1860), 799.

[5]Clarence Gohdes, American Literature in Nineteenth Century England, p. 137.

The reasons for Whitman's comparative neglect in America are not perfectly clear, and need not be examined in detail. Much of it was due, of course, to the inertia of conventional literary taste. W. M. Rossetti, for one, complained of this.[1] A rigid brand of Yankee morality was also against Whitman. These two forces, convention and moral code, were far more strict in America than in Britain. (Indeed, it was partly to escape them that Henry James had come to Europe; their presence was often pointed to as illustrating the advantage of having a leisure class.)

The American poet Sidney Lanier[2] made an objection to Whitman which is more to the point for the present study: he saw no significant future for society and art if Whitman were to be followed. He found Whitman "the most stupendously mistaken man in all history as to what constitutes true democracy, and the true advance of art and man."[3] Lanier also found in Whitman a lack of

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[1]Rossetti wrote to Charles Aldrich: "In the English editions my book (a selection of Whitman, introduced by Rossetti) concludes with a sentence saying that not Longfellow but Whitman is properly the national poet of America.... When the publishers in 1878 treated with American houses to circulate an American edition of my book, they found that no American would do so as long as that sentence stood in print.... I believe that all copies sold in America omit that final sentence, while all copies sold in England retain it." (W. M. Rossetti, op. cit., p. 186.)

[2]Lanier was dismissed by the Whitman circle as "one of the literati." Whitman's friend and biographer, William O'Connor, refers, e.g., to "poor Lanier's silly lectures." (Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, IV, 393.)

[3]Quoted by C. W. Moulton, op. cit., VIII, 141.

genuineness;[1] and Thomas Wentworth Higginson,[2] George Santayana,[3] and G. E. Woodbury[4] spoke of him as a fake--a fake of the sort that foreigners would not detect but that his own countrymen do detect. The British, they argued, have simply been taken in by a kind of Yankee bluster which they could not be expected to know. Theodore Watts-Dunton, who "hated Whitman most heartily" according to Gosse,[5] made a similar observation. If Whitman had been an Englishman, Watts-Dunton wrote in an obituary, "he would have

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[1]"Professing to be a mudsill and glorying in it, chanting democracy and shirtsleeves and equal rights, declaring that he is nothing if not one of the people, nevertheless the people, the democracy, will yet have nothing to do with him.... Whitman, instead of being a true democrat, is simply the most incorrigible of aristocrats masquing in a peasant's costume." (Ibid.)

[2]"He talks of labor as one who has never really labored; his "Drum Taps" proceed from one who has never personally responded to the tap of the drum. This is his fatal and insurmountable defect; and it is because his own countrymen instinctively recognize this, and foreigners do not, that his following has always been larger abroad than at home." (Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Contemporaries, p. 83.)

[3]Santayana does not regard Whitman as truly representative of America. He is so regarded "chiefly by foreigners who look for some grotesque expression of the genius of so young and prodigious a people." [Quoted in the "Contributor's Club," Atlantic Monthly, XCII (Nov., 1903), 715.]

[4]"His own countrymen...steadily refuse to accept him as representative of themselves...." G. E. Woodbury, "American Literature" Encyclopaedia Britannica (eleventh edition) (Cambridge, 1910), I, 840.

[5]Sir Edmund Gosse, The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne (London, 1917), p. 276.

received the same scant recognition here as he got from his own countrymen."[1]

There is a measure of truth at least in all of this. It must be kept in mind in getting a whole and accurate picture of Whitman's reception. The fairest statement of the phenomenon is given by Professor Blodgett:

> The Americans, conscious of the common criticism of their literary crudity and bumptiousness, wished to be considered as having grown too civilized to be deluded by Whitman's barbarism. The English, tired of a second-rate American literature superficially polished by a patterning after Old World models, hailed Whitman's originality....[2]

If it was Whitman's "originality" which first attracted attention, his British critics at least went beyond it and discussed much more. Soon after such men of repute as W. M. Rossetti and Swinburne had praised Whitman, the inevitable opposition announced itself. The result was a fairly thorough discussion of Whitmanism.

Before we survey these critical attitudes, something must be said about the editions in which Whitman came to Britain.

It could be argued quite convincingly that British critics were reviewing only parts and selections of Whitman--such as the carefully pruned selection which W. M. Rossetti published in 1868.

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[1] Athenaeum, LXX (April 2, 1892), 437.

[2] Harold Blodgett, op. cit., p. viii. Symonds makes a similar diagnosis in a letter to W. M. Rossetti. Cf. W. M. Rossetti, Rossetti Papers: 1862-1870 (London, 1903), p. 366.

This (so the argument might run) made the British more receptive to Whitman than they would have been, had he not been made "respectable" by British editors and publishers.

The grounds for such an argument are fairly solid. Whitman himself complained to Traubel of having appeared in Britain only in "pieces, extracts, bits, expurgations...."[1] George C. Macaulay noted that there was no complete edition of Leaves of Grass until 1881--this being the edition published by David Bogue, and including the whole of the "Preface" to the 1855 edition.[2] Blodgett verifies the Bogue edition as the first complete edition,[3] and also finds that the early British reviews of Whitman before Rossetti's selection are as hostile as the American reviews. "If there is a difference," comments Blodgett, "it is that the American reception is slightly more friendly."[4] And Blodgett makes Rossetti's careful editing responsible at least in part for the later warmth of reception in Britain.

But the editions do not really carry this much weight in determining British attitudes towards Whitman's theories of American literature--of modern literature. First of all, Rossetti's selection was not, strictly speaking, an expurgation; it was, as he

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[1]Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman ..., II, 419.

[2]Nineteenth Century, XII (Dec. 1882), 903.

[3]Harold Blodgett, op. cit., p. 191 n.

[4]Ibid., p. 9.

explains, "a selection of particular pieces in which there was nothing to expurgate."[1] Although the effect could be the same in either case on Whitman's chances for general acceptance, such editing could have no effect upon the acceptability of his specific teaching on the question of American literary orientation. For what Rossetti did exclude had little or no bearing on this and related problems; he simply wanted to avoid Whitman's "extreme crudities of expression in the way of indecency...."[2] Even Rossetti's edited version of the 1855 "Preface," while it deleted crude expressions (on Whitman's authority), did nothing to alter the thought. This kind of editing did not obscure from readers Whitman's central theses about democratic art.

Secondly, and more important, complete editions, whether authorized or not, did in fact have a fairly good distribution. Even the ill-fated 1855 edition seems to have picked up a London publisher's imprint; for the Saturday Review, in 1856, gave the book this announcement: "Leaves of Grass. New York: Brooklyn. [sic.] London: Horsell. 1855."[3] In 1860, the same journal reviewed "the sixth or seventh edition which has appeared in the United States." Again it seems to have found its way to a London

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[1] W. M. Rossetti, Some Reminiscences (London, 1906), II, 404.

[2] Entry in Rossetti's diary for September 6, 1867. Reprinted in Rossetti Papers, quoted by Blodgett, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

[3] Saturday Review, I (March 15, 1856), 393.

publisher, for the announcement reads:

> Leaves of Grass. By Walt Whitman. Boston: Thayer and Eldridge. Year 85 of the States. London: Trubner and Co. 1860.[1]

Whitman's American edition of 1872, published at Washington, D.C., was pirated by John Hotten.[2] Saintsbury, in 1874, must have had this one in hand when he referred to a "new edition of Leaves of Grass" which was greatly revised and expanded, and included "Drum Taps." He gave no date, but identified it as "London: Chatto and Windus."[3] In 1876, five years before Bogue's "first complete edition," the Saturday Review noted somewhat bitterly that "there is one firm at least in London which is not ashamed to advertise a 'complete' edition of Whitman's work."[4]

The final evidence for a good distribution of the complete Whitman must come from Whitman himself. It was in the course of a complaint to Traubel about appearing in fragments in Britain, that he suggested something which would seem completely out of proportion to the Whitman Circle in America:

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[1] Saturday Review, X (July 7, 1860), 19.

[2] Blodgett, op. cit., p. 191. Cf. also Whitman's letter to Rudolph Schmidt, in Traubel, With Walt Whitman ..., I, 408.

[3] Academy, VI (October 10, 1874), 398.

[4] Saturday Review, XLI (March 18, 1876), 360. This is probably a reference to Hotten's Chatto and Windus piracy. It could, however, refer to another piracy, or to an American edition only being sold in London. James Thomson speaks of the complete American edition of 1872 being available from Trubner's--but he does not state whether it is the actual Washington edition, or the Hotten piracy, or another piracy by Trubner. Cf. James Thomson, Walt Whitman, p. 1.

> The fact is, I am probably not any more popular there than here: it may even be that counting the sales of the Leaves complete many more books have been sold in America than in England.[1]

The point is that he is speaking here of complete editions; and that the common and accepted notion (in terms of which he is speaking) is that even these complete editions sold better in Britain than in America. Although Whitman contested the notion, he put the whole question in proper perspective.

It should also be noted that most of Whitman's ardent champions certainly did have complete editions, among them W. M. Rossetti, H. Buxton Forman, Mrs. Gilchrist, Symonds, Dowden, Buchanan, and Edward Carpenter. The fact does not seem to have influenced adversely their estimates of Whitman.

II.

As for Whitman, so for James: the real proving-ground was Britain, not America. James, like Whitman but for almost opposite reasons, was largely ignored in his homeland. Then too, American criticism was just beginning to formulate what it thought American literature should be, and James fitted the pattern no better than Whitman. Although Whitman was a strong patriot and a strong literary nationalist, he was too new, too different, too unconventional as a moralist, too far out of joint with popular predecessors like Longfellow, Bryant, and Whittier. James was an

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[1]Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman ..., II, 420.

expatriate who was too fond of Europe, writing fiction at a time when strong national feeling was rampant and fiction writers like Twain and Harte and the regionalists were carving out distinctively American pieces. It is hardly reasonable to expect valuable criticism of James to have come out of such a situation. A critic of his work, especially if he were to seek out and evaluate James's attempts to modify the course of the stream of modern literature, would need detachment and perspective; these positions were more accessible to British than to American critics.

James was not really popular in either country. He was fortunate in having an early spurt of popularity which gave him a ready market in American magazines and made him a lion in London society; but this waned early, especially in America.[1] His sales steadily declined, and he complained to Gosse at the age of seventy-two,

> I remain at my age...and after my long career, utterly, unsurmountably, unsaleable.[2]

He expressed the same sentiments to Howells and H. G. Wells.[3] His attempt to write for the stage was in part a deliberate attempt to improve his financial status, for the novels had been selling poorly; when this venture collapsed he wrote his last novels--the

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[1] Donald M. Murray, "Henry James and the English Reviewers, 1882-1890," American Literature, XXIV (March, 1952), 1-2.

[2] James, Letters, II, 515.

[3] Ibid., I, 135-137, 230; II, 503-505.

novels of "the major phase"--in conscious defiance of public taste.[1]

He was neglected in America more severely than in England. In the 1890's even the publishers turned cool.[2] John Hay complained of America's treatment of James in 1882, and blamed much of it on a spirit of patriotism.

> The worst thing in our time about American taste (wrote Hay) is the way it treats James. I believe he would not be read in America at all if it were not for his European vogue. If he lived in Cambridge he could write what he likes, but because he finds London more agreeable, he is the prey of all the patriotisms.[3]

Hay's statement about the "European vogue" is not really accurate. This vogue certainly is not apparent in the literary periodicals of the time, and Murray has shown that James, at this very time, complained that Europe was ignoring him even more than was America.[4] The truth probably lies somewhere between. It must be remembered that the Academy, in 1897, listed Henry James among forty names for election to a proposed Academy of Letters;[5] it must also be remembered, as the Quarterly Review pointed out, that the British reading public, weary of the same

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[1]Murray, op. cit.

[2]Grant C. Knight, The Critical Period in American Literature (Chapel Hill, 1951), pp. 14, 22-23, 106, 143.

[3]William R. Theyer, Life and Letters of John Hay (London, 1915), p. 411.

[4]Murray, op. cit., p. 4.

[5]Academy, LII (Nov. 6, 1897), 376.

old puppets and machinery of the English novelists, watched American writing with great interest in the hope of finding a change of scene and character.[1] Professor Gohdes[2] has calculated that James was reviewed less often in Britain than was Whitman; this is especially significant when we notice the large number of separate volumes of James which was published. But a bibliography of British reviews of James runs to hundreds of items, surely enough to make a study of them worthwhile. There were readers and reviewers and critics enough.

There was not always vision enough, though. It was difficult for the Victorians, hostile or friendly, to see Henry James as a representative of a particular cultural and literary orientation. It is fairly safe to generalize and note that before 1882 (through The Portrait of a Lady) there was much conservative objection to his realism, usually on moralistic grounds, and little attempt to see into his methods,[3] after 1882 there is a good deal of discussion of his methods and techniques, with a strong tendency to praise him as a skilled, delicate artist or to find fault with his delicacy and over-refinement. But many of the critics overlooked the concepts underlying James's methods; James

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[1] Quarterly Review, CLV (Jan., 1883), 202.

[2] Amer. Lit. in 19th Century England, 139.

[3] Professor Murray has discovered, for example, that not a single reviewer of The Portrait of a Lady caught James's device of revealing the character of Isabella Archer through the other characters surrounding her. (Critical Reception..., p. 49.)

himself, reflecting in 1888[1] on the English critics and reviewers, complained that the English novel

> had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it--of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison.

One reason James's broader concepts of art and his complex relationship to American literature were often overlooked was that the "timing" of his books was working against him. His ideas about America and the artist, about the artist and society and culture, are best expressed in his earliest books, especially Roderick Hudson, The Passionate Pilgrim, the early short stories, and Hawthorne. These books should have served as a clue to what James was really attempting; they should have given added meaning to James's place in his century. But when these books were published, James had not yet caught the attention of the critics. They did not pay James the honor of broad and intensive reviewing until the appearance of Daisy Miller, by which time he had pretty well said what he wanted to say about the situation of the artist in the modern world.

Then too, British critics were often set against James by the highly publicized tribute which Howells published in 1882. Howells' praise was expensive for James's reputation; it

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[1] The Art of Fiction, ed. Michael Roberts (New York, 1948), p. 3.

infuriated many critics[1]--critics who might have come to see James in perspective--by ranking James above Dickens and Thackeray. Because the British referred to it so often, it might be well to insert part of Howells' claim here:

> The art of fiction has, in fact, become a finer art in our day than it was with Dickens and Thackeray. We could not suffer the confidential attitude of the latter now, nor the mannerisms of the former, any more than we could endure the prolixity of Richardson or the coarseness of Fielding. These great men are of the past--they and their methods and their interests; even Trollope and Reade are not of the present. The new school derives from Hawthorne and George Eliot rather than any others.... This school...finds its chief exemplar in Mr. James; it is he who is shaping and directing American fiction, at least.[2]

James's highly artistic sensibilities also detracted the critics from seriously discussing his themes. As they began to grasp his techniques and methods, they began to treat them as ends in themselves, with little regard for broader implications. In seven different reviews of Embarrassments (1896), for example, no mention is made of "The Figure in the Carpet," and "The Next Time" receives but scanty general comment. Yet these stories are of great importance. The critics were puzzled and baffled by The Tragic Muse (1890); The Academy, generally warm

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[1]Within a five year period, five long articles appeared attacking James in the context of Howells' claim: National Review (April, 1883), Quarterly Review (January, 1883), Academy (April and December, 1886), and Macmillan's (March, 1887).

[2]Quoted in Academy, XXX (Dec. 25, 1886), 423.

to James, called it "an idiot asylum";[1] but again, the focus was on technique, and the novel's treatment of the artist in society was ignored. James's first installment of his autobiography, A Small Boy, was given many, many columns of review space--but almost all of it was devoted to a discussion of the unconventional form of the book. The concern with form and craft, while it necessarily opened up some of the bigger questions in James, did tend to drown out frequent and full discussion of these questions. William Wetmore Story and his Friends, now regarded as a very important work by Philip Rahv[2] and as "a major document on James's own relations with Europe" by Morton D. Zabel,[3] was almost completely ignored by the Victorians.

Whitman was an American bard--strangely, characteristically American and conveniently bardic; but James was neither of these. He was cosmopolitan, and he was a novelist who systematically excluded self-expression from his work. Because of his cosmopolitanism, English critics often treated him as though he were English; his work stimulated less discussion than it should have of American literature and the problems associated with it. Because his work was carefully impersonal, many critics simply ignored him; the impersonality violated a widely held Victorian

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[1] XLII (Aug. 16, 1890), 175.

[2] The Discovery of Europe (Boston, 1947), 270.

[3] The Portable Henry James (New York, 1951), 689.

criterion. Other critics concentrated on technique, manner, and method.

But although much of the criticism of James is oblique rather than direct, it is relieved by occasional pieces of full and penetrating work. And even the oblique approach reveals some highly interesting reflections of the Victorian sense of orientation. The most profound of James's Victorian critics, for our purposes, are Dixon Scott, Elizabeth Carey, Morton Fullerton, Robert Buchanan, Rebecca West, Ford Maddox Hueffer, and Lena Milman.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE OLD ORDER: TORIES AND CULTURAL CONSERVATIVES

As the nineteenth century moved beyond its mid-point, the United States was at the brink of an ugly Civil War and the pressure for social and political reform in England was mounting. The American experiment with commercialized democratic society seemed doomed to bloody and reckless defeat. The English felt little sympathy for the Yankee "cause"; even at Cambridge, the more liberal of the great universities, sympathies were so entirely with the South that Leslie Stephen, a rare sympathizer with the North, found himself cut off from his friends. But at the same time the Liberals and radicals were gaining power and influence. England was changing rapidly; her sense of orientation was disturbed. The old aristocracy had been crippled by the repeal of the Corn Laws; its members had either to limp on behind or to fall into a new and different step. The word Tory was becoming difficult to define.

It is important to remember that throughout the remainder of the century there are at least three different groups of Tories: the traditionalist Tories, who resisted social and political change and were violently anti-democratic (Alfred Austin, among men of letters, is exemplary); the Tory democrats, led by Disraeli and Randolph Churchill, who opposed the problems of the age by giving the masses paternal leadership and social reform, but a

bare minimum of political power; and finally, of less importance, the democratic Tories, whose motto seems to have been, give the people political power and they will not want social reform.

When America's Civil War was over and the Union surprisingly saved, the English began to watch the overseas experiment with even greater interest. England was sweeping on towards the second and third great Reform Bills; some form of democracy seemed to be the inevitable outcome. The old political conservatism was finding it necessary to modify and adapt itself. And as the British of all political persuasions watched developments in American culture, they were forced to re-examine the principles and assumptions of their own culture. Here the already complex party-lines were broken; it was not only Tories of one sort or another who could be expected to be apprehensive about American culture. Many of the "cultural conservatives"--Arnold and Lecky, for example--were essentially political liberals. But they had in common with Toryism a fear of anarchy and mobism, a respect for traditions and order, a reliance on a cultured class who would dominate learning and the arts with detachment and a sense of noblesse oblige, and often a fear that the middle classes were at best ill equipped to assume the obligations of their newly won power.

Inevitably, the conservatives betray some longing for the settled and ordered past. Sometimes it is a pleasing nostalgia, sometimes a bitter, narrow-minded, confused clanging on the alarum bell. The National Review, an organ for Tory traditionalism at

the end of the century, reflects both of these moods. Alfred Austin, Poet Laureate and sometime editor of the National, reveals this extreme Toryism in all its nostalgia and testiness. In a long article on the "Revival of Common Sense," written fifty-four years after the Reform Bill of 1832,[1] Austin declared that Englishmen since 1832 have been living in "an era of nonsense"; the middle classes are totally devoid of common sense, and the only hope for England lies in a return to aristocratic rule, based upon reason and experience and common sense. But this is not entirely or even characteristically the conservative mind in the Victorian age. It is almost a caricature, one which passes too often for the real thing. It must be modified by Disraeli's passion for social reforms which the Liberals fought against, by Frederic Harrison's interest in Bismarck,[2] by Matthew Arnold's concern for the present and future, and his dismissal of the aristocracy as "barbarians."

I.

Matthew Arnold's campaign against barbarism and Philistinism and his careful definitions of civilization and culture clearly mark him as a cultural conservative. But like Tocqueville's

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[1] National Review, VII (1886), 552-565.

[2] "The Radical Programme," Contemporary Review, XLIV (1886), 264-79. Harrison advocates education of opinion, government by competence, and authority by acquiescence.

conservatism, Arnold's is vitalized by a political liberalism.

His battlefield was primarily England. But Arnold realized that the English were increasingly turning towards America. In fact, as Professor Lowrey[1] suggests and the preface to Arnold's Report on French Schools indicates, his persistent references to French civilization may have been a conscious attempt to divert the attentions of the Victorians away from America. Surely America could be of no help in the fight against Philistinism; her Philistine class was almost her only class. America, Arnold observed, is "just ourselves, with the Barbarians quite left out, and the Populace nearly."[2] She presents "only a heightened picture of the Englishman's own faults,"[3] failing almost completely to reflect "whatsoever things are elevated."[4]

Arnold's concern about America and her influence upon England goes back at least as far as 1848. In that year he wrote about "a wave of more than American vulgarity, moral, intellectual, and social, preparing to break over us." America's crime did not lie in being different from the English, but in being so like the English Philistine.[5] It was the vulgarity that disturbed

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[1] "Introduction," Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough (London, 1932), pp. 48-9.

[2] Five Uncollected Essays (Liverpool, 1953), p. 6.

[3] Ibid., p. 7.

[4] Discourses in America (London, 1885), p. 66.

[5] The Letters of Matthew Arnold, ed. G.E.W. Russell (London 1895), I, 4.

him first. Although he claimed in "A Word About America" not to have spoken publically of American vulgarity before, the truth is that he had done so: in a sonnet in 1848, in the preface to Culture and Anarchy in 1869, and in the essay "Equality" in 1878.

After the American Civil War, Arnold became more concerned and interested but less critical and fearful. In Friendship's Garland[1] he satirized the pro-Confederacy leanings of his countrymen (and himself); Arminius says to his English friend, after satirizing English smugness and misunderstanding,

> Do you not see that all these blunders dispose the Americans, who are very shrewd, and who have been succeeding as steadily as you have been failing, to answer: "We have got the lead, no thanks to you, and we mean to astonish the world without you!"

America he now saw as an untamed giant, rich in potential but dangerously disoriented. In Culture and Anarchy, Arnold again attacked the idea, popularized by Cobden and Bright, that England should chart her course in the wake of America; but Arnold now no longer felt that England had much to teach America, either. Both were in need of Hellenization.

The theme of Arnold's five essays on America--and the key to his concern about American influence--can be stripped down to this: "... As we in England have to transform our civilization, so America has hers still to make."[2] He found in America an

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[1](London, 1903), p. 149.

[2]Five Uncollected Essays, p. 6.

abundance of wealth, a strong economy, infinite natural resources; but he found little that was beautiful or elevating or "interesting":

> Of the really beautiful in...the arts, and in literature, very little has been produced there as yet. I asked a German portrait-painter, whom I found painting and prospering in America, how he liked the country? 'How can an artist like it?' was his answer. The American artists live chiefly in Europe...[1]

Arnold feared that this might be a prophetic glimpse of the Britain that the middle class capitalists and John Bright wanted to build.

He used America, in fact, as a foil to his reflections on the cultural crisis in Victorian Britain. The orientation of a shifting, changing world could not be westward. For American Philistinism was worse than English Philistinism; it excluded not only aristocratic and popular elements, but the Celtic and Norman elements of the English heritage as well.[2] And all of these elements were endangered in Britain by the increasing domination of the middle classes. The American essays were merely continuing the critical mission begun in Culture and Anarchy.

Arnold saw the British aristocracy bogged down in its own materialism. But America had a worse problem: no aristocracy at all, and no substitute for it.[3] Still, the institution of an

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[1] Five Uncollected Essays, p. 55.

[2] On the Study of Celtic Literature (New York, 1909), p. 133.

[3] Five Uncollected Essays, p. 19.

aristocracy in America could not solve the cultural problem, for the aristocracy was already too altered in character. Arnold scorned Hussey Vivian's notion that America could be civilized by an American aristocracy. And yet, the absence of a past aristocracy in America seemed to him a major cause of the failure to solve "the human problem." If the British had not the cathedrals and homes built in aristocratic ages, if they had only the towns and buildings erected by the middle classes since the eighteenth century, their situation would be as serious as that of the Americans.

> We should be living with much the same absence of training for the sense of beauty through the eye, from the aspect of outward things.[1]

America, then, illustrates negatively the importance of an aristocracy at some stage in a society's history.

> It seems as if few stocks could be trusted to grow up properly without having a priesthood and an aristocracy to act as their schoolmasters at some time or other of their national existence.[2]

> ....in America, perhaps, we see the disadvantages of having social equality before there has been any...high standard of social life and manners formed.[3]

The complete indifference to "the ideal of a high and rare excellence" on the part of a growing world power seemed to Arnold

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[1] Five Uncollected Essays, p. 55.

[2] Letters, I, 115.

[3] Complete Works, X, 65.

dangerous. The effect upon literature was too obvious to mention--indeed, literature was always in Arnold's mind when he wrote social criticism, present by implication in "culture" and "civilization." Elevation, humanization, and cultivation were necessities, and they could only be achieved in America by a change in the social temper.

> The average man is too much a religion there; his performance is unduly magnified, his shortcomings are not duly seen and admitted.[1]

Arnold warned his American audiences that they must look to the Remnant, not to the Majority, for their salvation. It was his way of saying that Whitman's dream-America, with its isolation from the past and its worship of the common, would never suffice even if it could be realized. But his fear was not simply a fear of democracy; in an age of growing democracy, Arnold felt obligated "to prevent the English people from becoming, with the growth of democracy, Americanized."[2] His hope was that the Americans would come to recognize the necessity of culture, pay homage to "the best that has been thought and said in the world." Their nationalism was cutting them off from the traditions and refinements that made life human. The need was for a sense of excellence; this had to fill the void left by

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[1] Essays in Criticism, Second Series (London, 1888), p. 57.

[2] Mixed Essays, Irish Essays, and Others (New York, 1908), p. 17.

> the absence of men of any culture in America, where everybody knows that the earth is an oblate spheroid and nobody knows anything worth knowing.

All this clearly indicates an antipathy between Whitman and Arnold and a sense of common cause between Henry James and Arnold. Whitman saw Arnold as "one of the dudes of literature."[1] who "came in at the rear of a procession two thousand years old--the great army of critics, parlor apostles, worshippers of hangings, laces...."[2] On the occasion of Arnold's death, Whitman told the New York Herald that "the fine gentleman, the purist, even the fine scholar, was probably never really less called for.... I doubt whether America will miss Arnold at all."[3] Commenting on Arnold's insistence that culture is the one thing needed, Whitman told Traubel, "Arnold always gives you the notion that he hates to touch the dirt.... But everything comes out of the dirt--everything: everything comes out of people."[4] Arnold, Whitman thought,

> was weak on the democratic side: he had some intellectual perception of democracy but he didn't have the feel of the thing...he was first of all the leader, the superior, the teacher....[5]

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[1]Quoted by Lionel Trilling, Matthew Arnold, p. 396.

[2]Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman, I, 23.

[3]J. H. Birss, "Whitman on Arnold: An Uncollected Comment." Mod. Lang. Notes (May, 1932), p. 317. The original comment appeared in the April 16, 1888 issue of the New York Herald.

[4]Quoted by Trilling, p. 398.

[5]Traubel, III, p. 37.

Whitman's concept of a democratic culture put feeling above intellect, abolished the idea of leadership and teaching, and buried traditions and the past. Though Arnold took little interest in Whitman--his letters last mention Whitman in 1867, and on both visits to the United States he was near Camden but made no effort to visit him--it is precisely this concept of culture that he feared. He was quite specific in attacking the nationalist movement in American literature:

> I see advertized The Primer of American Literature. Imagine the face of Philip or Alexander at hearing of a Primer of Macedonian Literature.... We are all contributors to one great literature--English literature...these things are not only absurd; they are also retarding.[1]

The riches of tradition, already in danger of becoming disengaged from Victorian English life, had to play their part in the formation of an American literature. In Arnold's one surviving comment on Whitman,[2] the theme is the same:

> As to the general question of Mr. Walt Whitman's poetical achievements, you will think that it savours of our decrepit old Europe when I add that while you think it his highest merit that he is so unlike anyone else, to me this seems to be his demerit; no one can afford in literature to trade merely on his own bottom and to take no account of what the other ages and nations have acquired: a great original literature America will not get in this way, and her intellect must inevitably consent to come...into the European movement.[3]

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[1] Civilization in the United States, 61-2.

[2] Blodgett, Walt Whitman in England, p. 168.

[3] Quoted by Trilling, p. 397.

America can still, Arnold insisted, have intellectual independence; the thing she must avoid is "an eccentric and violent originality."[1]

Arnold and James, as we have seen in Chapter VIII, saw the problem of orientation in much the same way. James's "dispatriation" is a clever application of Arnold's "disinterestedness" to the rootless predicament of the American writer. James was almost the only passionate admirer of Arnold to come out of nineteenth century America,[2] surely a guarantee of the indifference of other Americans. Arnold was conscious of the kinship between himself and the younger expatriate American novelist. Soaking in the self-satisfaction of his own "A Word About America," he wrote to Sir Mountstuart Grant Duff,[3]

> I think you would have liked it.... At any rate, Henry James, the novelist, being asked by Knowles to write a reply to it, said after reading it that he could not write a reply to it, it was so true, and carried him so along with it.

Arnold's busy life as a school inspector, speaker, and contributor to journals probably left him little time for novel reading. In any case, he was not a devoted novel reader; his mark as a critic was not made by his comments upon novelists. He had read Hawthorne, of course; he found his talent to be "of the

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[1] Quoted by Trilling.

[2] Ibid., p. 392.

[3] Letters, II, p. 200.

first order," but found his subjects (sin, guilt, and solitude) uninteresting.[1] Like most nineteenth century critics--Robert Buchanan, of all people, is the exception in Britain--Arnold did not know Melville. But he had read something of both Howells and James (an interesting choice!), and he used the same word to describe the novels of each: "charming."[2] Arnold left no extensive comments upon James's work; but his choice of a favorite is interesting and probably revealing. The one book he singled out was Roderick Hudson.[3] Arnold was apparently partially blind to the formal defects of the book. Few if any critics in 1885, ten years after its publication, would have hit upon this book as the James novel most deserving of mention. But it was the social critic in Arnold that responded to young James's first novel. For it was in this novel, more than in any other, that James was reflecting the American artist's need of the European objects and frame of mind that Arnold called culture.

II.

A conservative prophet who was even less a novel-reader than Arnold was Thomas Carlyle. He too sensed the magnetic attraction that America held for many of his bewildered contemporaries. As

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[1] Discourses in America, p. 174.

[2] Ibid.; Mixed Essays, p. 479.

[3] Civilization in the United States, p. 79.

a young man, he had himself considered emigrating. Unlike Arnold, Carlyle felt that democracy itself portended catastrophe; he fulminated against it in such pieces as "Shooting Niagara." But even for Carlyle, with all his hostility to the democratic groundswells, there was something fascinating about the New World. In his early years he saw it often as a land of sunshine and hope and hard work and strong Anglo-Saxon pioneers. The Civil War discouraged him, and may account for the bitterness of "Shooting Niagara" and the passage in Frederick the Great which attacks American government as "an anarchy which has been challenging the Universe to show the like, ever since...and does need much to get burnt out that matters may begin anew on truer conditions."[1] Carlyle, even before the war, could be as astounded as anyone by the quantity of America's material production, but he looked in vain for some great thought or noble thing. America has given the world, grumbled Carlyle, "with a rapidity beyond recorded example, eighteen millions of the greatest bores ever seen in this world before."[2] "What great human soul," he asked, "what great thought, what great noble thing that one could worship or loyally admire" has been produced in America?[3] Still, after 1871, Carlyle's letters to Emerson show a gradual return to some kind

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[1](New York, 1866-8), VI, p. 263.

[2]Latter Day Pamphlets (London, 1850), p. 172.

[3]Ibid., p. 171.

of modified hope for America. Characteristically, however, Carlyle could believe that America would produce a vital civilization only "with the aid of centuries."[1] She would have difficulty controlling the evil forces--the"gold nuggetting"--within her.

What the mature Carlyle knew of America he knew largely by way of his friend and fellow transcendentalist, Emerson. The blunt estimates of Emerson's work in Carlyle's letters to him are still worth reading. Throughout those fascinating letters, Carlyle is impressed by the grand view of the universe in Emerson's poems. Traces of Carlyle's uneasiness with artistic form (a trait which allies him with Whitman) are freely evident in his statement to Emerson that the poems have ideas which are worth the struggle of reading, and in his growling complaint that Emerson insists on taking "circumbendibuses for sound's sake."[2] His tone is remarkably like Emerson's (and later Whitman's) when he thunders forth his enthusiasm for The American Scholar with this kind of language:

> ...Lo, out of the West comes a clear utterance, clearly recognisable as a Man's voice, and I have a kinsman and brother.[3]

What Carlyle sought in Emerson--though he was often disappointed--

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[1] Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York, 1883), II, 377.

[2] Ibid., II, 146.

[3] Ibid., I, 141-2.

was free, rugged masculinity. One of his constant criticisms is that Emerson must come down from the mountain-tops, get out of the abstract and ethereal.[1] This is, in fact, Carlyle's main objection to the American writers in general.[2] But there is another, more significant criticism which separates Carlyle from Emerson--and consequently from Thoreau, Whitman, and most of the Westward-oriented tradition in American literature. In commenting on Emerson's Society and Solitude (1870), Carlyle takes issue with the excess of Emersonian, American, optimistic disregard for evil.[3] Charles Eliot Norton, the editor of the Emerson-Carlyle correspondence and a close friend of Henry James, knew both men well enough to sense this irreparable difference between them. Upon returning to Boston after a prolonged visit with Carlyle in London (1873), Norton[4] wrote this to his aging host:

> All life is likely to be solitary in America to one who cannot share that confident spirit of cheerful optimistic fatalism of which Emerson is the voice and the prophet.

One cannot imagine Carlyle, after "struggling" through Emerson's poems, struggling through a novel by Henry James. We tend to imagine that his response would be much the same as Whitman's. But we also often tend to imagine that Carlyle's

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[1] Corresp. Emerson and Carlyle, I, 383.

[2] Ibid., I, 169, 330, 339; II, 12. [3] Ibid., II, 359.

[3] Letters of Charles Eliot Norton, ed. Sara Norton and M. A. De Wolfe Howe (New York, 1913), II, 18.

strong instincts for manliness, naturalness, things of the soil, and a transcendentalist view of nature would make him an easy victim to the lusty voice of Whitman. Indeed, Whitman himself sensed a great deal of similarity, as we have seen in Chapter VII. He could even forgive Carlyle his anti-democratic pronouncements and judgments. His debt to the vitriolic old Scot was as great as was James's debt to Arnold. Had Carlyle read Leaves of Grass, suggests Professor Holloway,[1] he "might have recognized something of his Sartor Resartus in more than the style of the book." Whitman, another critic[2] has shown, had read most of Carlyle, and read it deeply. When Leaves of Grass appeared in 1855, both Whitman and Emerson sent a copy to Carlyle.

But Carlyle never satisfied his American correspondents. In all the writings, letters, and memoirs from which scholars must reconstruct Carlyle, there are only three references to Whitman.[3] In a letter to Emerson, Carlyle said of Whitman's book that "it was as though the town bull had learned to hold the pen." In conversation, Carlyle told William Allingham in 1872 that he found Democratic Vistas "somewhat" good.[4] He confided to Moncure Conway

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[1] Walt Whitman: An Interpretation in Narrative (New York, 1926), p. 136.

[2] William Silas Vance, Carlyle and the American Transcendentalists (Chicago, 1941), p. 394.

[3] Cf. Gregory Paine, "The Literary Relations of Whitman and Carlyle," Studies in Philology, XXXVI (July, 1939), 550-569.

[4] Ibid.

his distrust of Whitman's break with tradition--probably the source of Carlyle's lack of interest in Whitman: "Ah, I cannot like him. It all seems to be, 'I'm a big man because I live in such a big country.'" And then he added, significantly, "America ...will have to learn from the experience and age of the world."[1]

Whitman was right: he was "outside to Carlyle."[2] Every word that came to him indirectly from the prophet he admired was "distinctly unfavorable."[3] Carlyle's kinship with transcendentalism did not dispose him to deny the existence of evil or the importance of tradition and experience.

III.

By far the most explicit and articulate conservative critique of Whitman in the nineteenth century--in British or American criticism--can be found in the writings of Peter Bayne. Bayne is now all but unknown; his miscellaneous critical writings have never been gathered into a book. In an age such as ours, with its keen interest in the neo-conservative assault on Liberalism (witness again Hulme, Eliot, Pound, Tate, Viereck, and Auden), Bayne deserves some attention.

He was a Scot who had studied philosophy under the Cairds at

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[1]Moncure D. Conway, Thomas Carlyle (New York, 1881), p. 100.

[2]Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, II, 328.

[3]Vance, Carlyle and the American Transcendentalists, p. 409.

Glasgow University. Equally well read in philosophy, theology, and history, he gave much of his attention to studying and writing Puritan history. Politically, Bayne was a Tory. He edited and contributed to a number of periodicals, among them Hogg's Weekly Magazine, The Contemporary Review, Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, and the Christian World.[1] Bertram Dobell rightly called him "the ablest of Whitman's opponents."[2] Professor Blodgett accused him of pouncing upon Whitman "like a Sunday School superintendent upon a bad boy" but goes on to characterize Bayne's criticism as "a very plausible Tory attack" which "states with adequacy and vigor the formidable case that all respectable persons have against Leaves of Grass."[3]

Blodgett's use of "respectable" just after the simile of a Sunday School superintendent is an intentional slur, and it obscures the genuine quality of Bayne's criticism.

Bayne recognized the need for originality in literature; but even originality must work within limits. Whitman exceeds the bounds which are fixed to "sound poetic originality," and hence "is merely grotesque, and surprising."[4] Originality must be

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[1]Lloyd C. Sanders, ed., Celebrities of the Century (London, 1887), p. 104; Ronald Bayne, "Peter Bayne," Dictionary of National Biography, XXII (Supplement), 146-147.

[2]Bertram Dobell, "Introduction," in James Thomson, op. cit., p. vii.

[3]Harold Blodgett, op. cit., p. 199.

[4]Peter Bayne, "Walt Whitman's Poems," Contemporary Review, XXVII (December, 1875), 67.

genuine; there must be changes, but they must confine themselves to general principles which govern the various genres of art. It is the function of the critic to act as a control in this process.

> If the necessity of being original lies hard upon poets in these days, is it not all the more...the duty of the critics to press upon them the equally inexorable necessity of resisting the fascinations of false and affected originality?[1]

"Every art-product," Bayne argued, "is new";

> but every art-product is also old; and the operation of producing a true poem or picture...consists essentially in combining newness of form and colour and musical harmony with oldness of principle and law.[2]

It is this that Whitman neglects; he is starting out on a path that can lead only to barbarism. But note that Bayne's argument for tradition is not based simply on a stubborn belief that literary classics cannot be surpassed, but can at best be imitated. There is always development in literature: but only, Bayne insisted, in the sense in which decay is also a kind of "development." Modern literature can surpass classical literature, because it is a natural outgrowth of it, maintaining an organic relationship with it in what Mr. Eliot was later to call a "continuing tradition." But if it defies the relationship, and sets out on its own, it cannot survive.

> By working in the spirit of the lesson taught it once and forever by Greece, Europe has gone beyond Greece; but as far as Europe, in Shakespeare, has transcended

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[1] Peter Bayne, "Walt Whitman's Poems," p. 66.

[2] Ibid.

> Greece, so far will America fall behind and below not Europe only, but Egypt, Babylon, and Assyria, if she cast the lesson of Greece to the winds and consent to the identification of democracy with lawless extravagance.[1]

This concept of a continuing tradition in art, with every part in organic relationship with every other part, was a natural opposite to Whitman's vision of a new literature springing naturally from the democratic standards of a mass culture. For Bayne, art is still art; the principles by which we judge it are tied to universals; universal truths are not modified by social change. Thus Bayne put no value on the Whitman _apologia_ which made an issue of the new demands of a new kind of culture. Nature in America, Whitman's "divine infant," may be different from nature in Europe; "but we do not, in crossing the Atlantic, pass from cosmos into chaos...."[2]

Peter Bayne was really the only Whitman opponent who covered him as completely as did supporters like Symonds and Dowden. He had an unfortunate disability for finding anything except "atrociously bad" verse in _Leaves of Grass_, but he saw clearly, from his own philosophical perspective, the central issues which Dowden and Symonds had seen (more easily) from theirs. Bayne is singular among Whitman's opponents for having seen clearly, and for having dealt with, the broad issues which Whitman implied.

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[1]Peter Bayne, "Walt Whitman's Poems."

[2]_Ibid._, p. 68.

Bayne was speaking from an entirely different view-point. He is almost in another universe of discourse--one which may have been peculiar in his own time, but one which is remarkably similar to the tone of the "new conservatives" of the present time. Political and social thought is deeply inter-mixed in his comments on Whitman. As a Tory he objected to Whitman's "subtle and pervasive flattery of the mob." He is (in retrospect) amusingly naive about the social changes which surrounded him--but he was simultaneously raising the right questions.

> Until I examined (Whitman's) book I did not know that the most venomously malignant of all political and social fallacies--that 'one man is as good as another' --had been deliberately taught in print.... Goethe said that poets raised men to the gods, and brought down the gods to men; but that every man was himself as good as either god or poet, Goethe would have denied with keenest brilliancy of scorn.[1]

If Bayne was quick to dismiss Whitman's art, it was partly because he was deeply interested in Whitman's thought. He had no patience with Whitman's joyous over-simplification of metaphysical problems: he decries the fact that

> ...problems that were felt to be insoluble by Shakespeare and Goethe have no difficulty for this bard of the West. Extravagant optimism and extravagant pessimism, both wrong and shallow, conduct him to "the entire denial of evil" (the words are Professor Dowden's)...and to the vociferous announcement that success and failure are pretty much the same.[2]

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[1] Bayne, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

[2] Ibid., p. 51.

This kind of optimism seemed to Bayne completely unwarranted: first, because it misconstrued reality, and second, because it was intimately bound up with an actual social program of near-anarchy which threatened to strangle "civilization." "His advice," said Bayne (and he was actually quoting),

> is to resist much and obey little. This is the political philosophy of bedlam...which has blasted the hopes of freedom wherever it has had the chance, and which must be chained up again with ineffable contempt if the self-government of nations is to mean anything else than the death and putrescence of civilization.[1]

Bayne ended his criticism on a more level note of warning, a note which is free of the sharp, antithetical Tory self-interest of which he has been accused. He complained of Whitman's "confounding liberty with dissolute anarchy," and stated well the case which he--almost alone among British critics--thinks can and must be set against Whitman:

> The poet of democracy he is not; but his books may serve to buoy, for the democracy of America, those shallow and sunken rocks on which, if it is cast, it must inevitably, amid the hootings of mankind, be wrecked.[2]

IV.

One of the most interesting Victorian reactions to Whitman can be traced over a twenty year period in the writings of

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[1] Bayne, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

[2] Ibid., p. 69.

Swinburne. Swinburne covered all the ground from adulation in 1868 through doubt and misgiving in the mid-1870's to fierce and indignant ridicule in 1887. The turnabout brought from Whitman a characteristic harumph: "Ain't he the damndest simulacrum?" Because Swinburne's gradual disenchantment, erroneously and too simply blamed on Watts-Dunton by Gosse and others, follows a course from liberal to conservative, from westward to eastward orientation, we must consider it here in a chapter on Victorian conservatism.

In Swinburne's early period--we may as well call it his Mazzini period--he was a fiery republican zealot with a passion for reform, for social and political revolution. Naturally he would advocate and want to be a part of an attending literary revolution. His attention, when it was not on Mazzini and political reform, was fixed on Blake. It was the rebel, the innovator, the unleashed spirit in Blake that fascinated him. In his book William Blake (1868) can be found his first mention of Whitman; the final chapter of the book is an essay on Whitman which applauds the new American poet as a contemporary parallel to Blake. Swinburne found in Whitman

> A sound as of sweeping wind...a splendour now of stars and now of storms; an expanse and exultation of wing across strange spaces of air...a depth of sympathy... as tender as Dante's; a power, intense and infallible, of pictorial concentration and absorption...an exquisite and lyrical excellence of form.[1]

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[1]A. C. Swinburne, William Blake (London, 1868), p. 302.

Three years later Swinburne published his Songs Before Sunrise. Revolutionary fervor was still running strong, as even the title of the volume suggests. Dedicated to Mazzini, it is a salute to freedom, democracy, and man-as-god. The liberalism is so intense that, in fact, the poem "To Walt Whitman in America"[1] is disappointing in its cold use of Whitman and America as little more than abstract symbols of freedom and hope. Whitman's verse is described as

> A song to put fire in our ears
> Whose burning shall burn up tears,
> Whose sign bid battle reform.

The interesting question is, How did Swinburne transport himself from this enthusiastic acceptance of Whitman to the blistering attack in "Whitmania" which asserted with biting condescension that "with a little more sense and a great deal more cultivation [Whitman] might...have made a noticeable orator"; that "with careful training" he might have matured into "a rather inferior kind of Southey"?[2]

Sir Edmund Gosse[3] explained the change as a manifestation of the influence of Theodore Watts-Dunton, with whom Swinburne lived

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[1] Complete Works, ed. Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas J. Wise (London, 1926), II, 184-189.

[2] A. C. Swinburne, Studies in Prose and Poetry (London, 1894), p. 140.

[3] Swinburne (London, 1917), p. 276 ff.

a life of near-dependence in the early 1880's. Professor Blodgett[1] apparently agrees: "If we turn again to the last pages of William Blake," writes Blodgett, "we are filled with a vast respect for the corrupting power of time--and Mr. Watts-Dunton." There is some good sense to this. Surely Watts-Dunton fanned the flame of disenchantment; Swinburne's reference in "Whitmania" to the "first critic of our time--perhaps the largest-minded and surest-sighted of any age"[2] is a traceable reference to Watts-Dunton. But actually, as W. B. Cairns had earlier shown,[3] Swinburne's about-face was the product of a slowly fermenting antipathy.

The growth of the antipathy is revealing. Swinburne did not meet Watts-Dunton until 1879, but by this time his estrangement from Whitman had a slow eight-year growth. Perhaps there was something artificial from the start about Swinburne's radicalism. W. M. Rossetti, at least, thought so. Already in 1870 he complained in a letter to Ann Gilchrist, a devotee who entertained ideas about marrying Whitman, about the "excited politico-humanitarian" tone in Swinburne, "pumped up by incitements from Mazzini principally. I don't think it well to be perpetually flaring up about the affair in verse, & moreover compelling

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[1] Walt Whitman in England, pp. 112-113.

[2] Studies in Prose and Poetry, p. 135.

[3] "Swinburne's Opinion of Whitman," American Literature, III (May, 1931), 125-135.

oneself to flare up."[1] Saintsbury thought he noticed the same sham in Swinburne:

> It is true that [Whitman] has been praised with discrimination as well as with emphasis, by Mr. Swinburne; but unfortunately Mr. Swinburne's praise is mainly a passport to the favour of those who would be likely to appreciate Whitman without any passport at all.[2]

In any case, genuine or sham, Swinburne's enthusiasm was breaking apart fairly early. One year after Songs Before Sunrise he published Under the Microscope. In it the seeds of antipathy are obvious. He was already doubtful about the democratic basis of the new literature:

> It is when he is thinking of his part, of the duties and properties of a representative poet, an official democrat, that the strength forsakes his hand and the music ceases at his lips.[3]

In spite of his avowal early in the book that he is "entirely at one with Whitman on general matters not less than on political,"[4] he is immediately uncomfortable with Whitman's uncompromising use of the word democracy. He wants it to include, for example, "a code of duties."[5] This is hardly popular language among nineteenth century liberals; it would fit more exactly a Carlyle or an Arnold. The matter came to a head with Swinburne's intervention in

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[1] W. M. Rossetti, Letters...Concerning Whitman, Blake, and Shelley, ed. Clarence Gohdes and P. F. Baum (Durham, N.C., 1934), p. 58.

[2] Academy, VI (Oct. 10, 1874), 398.

[3] Complete Works, XVI, 416-7. [4] Ibid., 413. [5] Ibid., 418.

Whitman's attempt to throw Shakespeare out of the new republic. For Swinburne to write that "...there has never been and can never be a book so infinitely democratic as the Plays of Shakespeare" is merely confusing, and indicates an unexpressed shift in the definition of the word democratic. It was when Swinburne tried to defend his statement that he showed the extent of the breach--for he stumbled through and explained with pompous obscurity that the plays were democratic because they "signify... the cyclic life and truth of equal and various humanity."[1] If such writing has any positive content, it is still brought forth with a noticeable lack of spirit.

The fact is, eight years before Watts-Dunton's entry from the right, Swinburne's zeal was fading. It now seemed to him

> foolish to talk of Whitman as the probable founder of a future school of poetry unlike any other in matter as in style. He has many of the qualities of the reformer; he has perhaps none of the qualities of a founder.[2]

Swinburne's letters of this period bear out the same growing estrangement.[3] In one of them, to W. M. Rossetti in 1876, he speaks of the pity of Whitman's "damned nonsense about poetry and verse."[4]

By 1887, the break was complete. In "Whitmania" he compared

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[1] Complete Works, XVI, 419. [2] Ibid., 425.

[3] Cairns, p. 135.

[4] Complete Works, XVIII, 254.

Whitman to Tupper and to Zola. Whitman, he said, cannot be put to shame because "you cannot take the breeks off a Highlander."[1] He found offensive the "obtrusive animalism of the Whitmaniad." Whitman's style was crude. He could now find in Whitman's Eve only

> a drunken apple-woman, indecently sprawling in the slush and garbage of the gutter amid the rotten refuse of her overturned fruit-stall.[2]

The old excitement about Whitman's strong freedom, his bardic power, his soaring, uninhibited naturalness, his auspicious portent of the life and the art to come, had died out in Swinburne.

Swinburne's reversal of opinion, complicated by a number of factors and going beyond a simple shift from liberal to conservative, was nonetheless certainly related to his fluctuations in social and political opinion. He had been a passionate liberal. Like most liberals, he looked hopefully towards America. But somehow he could not hold the vision. He finally rejected democracy as firmly as he rejected Whitman's democratic art--a theory of art that could dispense with Shakespeare. In the final years Swinburne steeled himself in aristocratic thought. He defended British participation in the Boer War, scorned Gladstone and the policy of Home Rule, and grumbled frequently about democracy.[3] He had flirted with the ideology and art of the new

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[1] Studies in Prose and Poetry, 137.

[2] Ibid., 138-9.

[3] Gosse, Swinburne, pp. 293-294. Cf. also W. M. Rossetti, Some Reminiscences, I, p. 219.

emancipated man, but had found it wanting. Perhaps W. M. Rossetti[1] was the closest to the truth about Swinburne when he suggested that Swinburne's attempt to be a democrat went against the grain of his background, education, and temperament:

> Swinburne belongs by birth and nurture to the aristocratic class; and, though he has put forth very advanced democratic and republican views, his temperament and demeanour witness to his origin.

V.

For a final look at some conservative commentary on the orientation of American literature, we turn to a few writers who are not first-rank critics but who still express some significant part of the conservative mind in the nineteenth century.

Among the major conservative critics and their critical journals there is a wide range of response and few if any clear-cut critical standards. The same is true of the lesser critics.

To begin with an oddity, consider Lord Strangford, a dilettante orientalist who tried to get off the shifting sands of Victorian transition and confusion by attaching himself to and preaching Persian mysticism. He saw in Whitman, of course, Persian characteristics. In a better and more knowledgeable world than republican America, Whitman might have been saved from "his sty of Epicurean autolatry";

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[1] Some Reminiscences, I, 219.

> We should have caught him early, sent him to study at Shiraz, and eventually set him to work on a bona fide metrical and rhythmical translation or reproduction of the glorious rolling hendecasyllabics of Jelâluddîn Rûmi....[1]

But enough of Lord Strangford.

Theodore Watts-Dunton[2] was more skillful than most of his contemporaries in explaining why a national literature was impossible in America. The problem, he argued, is not just that America is not natus but mere populus and therefore essentially an English colony. He saw a greater problem--one which is very much present in contemporary literature: the American mob is taught to hate the old world while the educated class increasingly feels a need for it. Thus the natural tendency will be a widening of the gap between artist and intelligentsia on the one hand and the democratic mass on the other. The danger in this situation is obvious: the badly needed influence of English civilization will be barred by popular sentiment. But Watts-Dunton did not think the situation hopeless. Should American writers manage to overcome these inherent difficulties, he concluded, they may even outdo England in the production of literature--but of English literature. On this basis we can understand Watts-Dunton's rejection of Whitman.[3]

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[1]"Walt Whitman," Pall Mall Gazette, XIII (Feb. 16, 1866), 134.

[2]"The Future of American Literature," Fortnightly Review, XLIX (June 1, 1891), 910-926.

[3]See Theodore Watts-Dunton, "Walt Whitman," Athenaeum, LXX (April 2, 1892), 436-7.

The Tory fear of democratic leveling of art and thought was put succinctly but moderately by W. E. H. Lecky, the historian. Lecky, though he was not a Tory, embodied much of the spirit of the protest of Victorian intellectuals against democracy and its consequences. His great work, Democracy and Liberty, was written from a distinctly conservative point of view and showed little hope for the future of democratic societies. "It is largely a doubt, a protest, and a regret."[1] But in spite of this spirit of melancholy protest, Lecky thought that Tocqueville had been too severe. He argued that America had, in fact, produced some good literature and fine art. The observation did not blind him, however, to the lack of quality and the "intellectual sterility" which so poorly fitted a great nation. His analysis, despite his own disclaimer, was similar to Tocqueville's:

> "...modern democracy is not favorable to the higher forms of intellectual life. Democracy levels down quite as much as it levels up. The belief in the equality of man, the total absence of the spirit of reverence, the apotheosis of the average judgment, the fever and the haste, the advertising and sensational spirit which American life so abundantly generates...are all little favourable to the production of great works of beauty or of thought, of long meditation, of sober taste, of serious, uninterrupted study.[2]

Lecky also saw a major consequence of the situation:

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[1] Dictionary of National Biography, Second Supplement (London, 1912), II, 435-440.

[2] W.E.H. Lecky, Democracy and Liberty (London, 1896), I, 108.

> No one can fail to observe how large a proportion of the Americans who have shown distinguished talent in literature and art have sought in European life a more congenial atmosphere than they could find at home.[1]

Most conservatives, as we have seen, rejected Whitman. Fredrick York Powell, Professor of Modern History at Oxford, joined the Quarterly as an exception. He was a man who shared none of Whitman's faith in democracy, a man who had "a Tory's distrust of [American] culture and civilization."[2] Yet he had nothing but respect for "the great man Whitman"[3] and named him "the only man I would cross the water to see."[4] He wrote Henley in 1891 that, outside of Whitman, American Literature was a "farce."[5] The explanation, however, is not difficult to discover: Powell, perhaps in spite of his Toryism, was a pronounced optimist who was attracted by Whitman's optimism. Still more significantly, there was between them a common view of history. Powell, according to his biographer, Oliver Elton, "seemed, like Whitman, to define evil as the perishable element in the world."[6]

There remain for our consideration two conservative estimates of Henry James. Lady F. P. Verney,[7] with Howells and James

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[1] Democracy and Liberty.

[2] Oliver Elton, Fredrick York Powell: A Life (Oxford, 1906), 21-22.

[3] Ibid., p. 135. [4] Ibid., p. 122.

[5] Ibid., p. 135. [6] Ibid., p. 409.

[7] "The Americans as Painted by Themselves." Contemporary Review, XLVI (Oct., 1884), 543-555.

especially in mind, added one more to the pile of comments about America's need for a past. But she apparently did not realize that precisely this was one of James's themes, that much of his drama was built on the clash of American innocence and European experience. To her it seemed a deficiency in James himself, a deficiency that he exemplified rather than one that he explored. This is one of the many confusions which denied James a sympathetic hearing by conservative critics. After making the totally ignorant observation that James cannot expect women like Isabella Archer to be "taken to the homes and hearts of the British Aristocracy," the review moves on:

> The almost entire absence of an ideal of any kind, in men and women alike, of any poetic feeling of character, is strange in so young a literature. Society and its representatives in America seem to have jumped at a bound into the somewhat blase, artificial, conventional stage of that in the old world, but without the charm and grace which being to the manner born gives it in Europe.... The unconscious enrichment of the imagination of a people, a nation with no past must do without.

Without the smug English aristocratic complacency, James would surely agree.

One of three books on Henry James to appear in his own lifetime was written by the authoritarian, anti-democratic conservative Ford Maddox Ford (then Hueffer).[1] Like the mind of his own greatest character, Christopher Tietjens, Ford's mind had the

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[1]Ford Maddox Hueffer, Henry James: A Critical Study (London, 1913).

instincts and sensibilities of "the last English Tory." He was at the same time, of course, a brilliant experimental stylist who moved from his Pre-Raphaelite background through Flaubert and James and Conrad to his own stream-of-consciousness impressionism. Perhaps he ought to be considered in Chapter XIV rather than here; but he has his place in this chapter because his essentially feudal outlook weighed heavily in his estimate of James. He saw James, as he saw himself, as a dispassionate viewer and impressionistic reporter of "the Parade's end."

Indeed, it is the Tory cast of mind that drew Ford into his one great misjudgment of James. He identified James's outlook too closely with his own. James, he thought, was steeped in disillusionment, a disillusionment beyond that of Turgenev and Flaubert. His entire book on James is colored by this notion. The theory inspired a brilliant defense (and penetrating analysis) of James by a young critic named Dixon Scott (see Chapter XIV).

That one misunderstanding of Ford's is significant. The conservative mind often failed to see the kinship between itself and the work of Henry James; Ford saw more kinship than there really was, as Dixon Scott was quick to point out.

In approaching James, Ford identified himself as "an upholder of the Feudal system."[1] If the kind of life James depicts, he wrote,

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[1]Hueffer, op. cit., p. 65.

> if this life, which is the best our civilisation has to show, is not worth the living; if it is not pleasant, cultivated, civilised...then, indeed, Western civilisation is not worth going on with...

Such life had to be preserved--partly because this upper class of James's must be the model of the lower classes.[1] Because of the way in which James had caught this theme, he was not only "the greatest of living writers and in consequence, for me, the greatest of living men,"[2] but he was also "the greatest servant of the State now living."[3]

Ford did not mean that James was didactic; he was more the artist for having no public aims. His American birth was "a golden spoon in his mouth," for it gave him complete freedom in penetrating Europe.[4] It gave him the device of detached narration, a "singular pitilessness" in regard to his characters which was "the secret of his greatness."[5]

Still, Ford thought James did have a mission, "just one immense mission--the civilising of America."[6] His purpose in coming to the old world was

> to find a milieu, an atmosphere, upon which America might safely mould hers--an atmosphere in which wise and sympathetic duchesses and countesses said always the right thing, observed the 'old forms and pleasant rites' ....

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[1] Hueffer, op. cit., p. 61. [2] Ibid., p. 7.

[3] Ibid., p. 68. [4] Ibid., p. 124.

[5] Ibid., pp. 24-26. [6] Ibid., p. 94.

The touch of sarcasm was intended; for it was Hueffer's conviction that James, although his mission was noble, ended in delusion; he found only meaninglessness.[1]

Even though James's mission ended in delusion, Ford thought that James, "the greatest of living men," had determined the direction that modern literature should take. In James's materials as well as in his manner Ford found the richness and depth that art needed. If he thought it necessary for the Old World to look to the New, it was not for a free, emancipated, democratic literature but for a fresh sense of the drama and meaning of Europe. It was the Americans who could best restore this sense. In another book, Ford worked again at the question of resources for modern literature and credited the Americans with the greater responsibility for developing, largely through Poe and James, the European "mainstream" of literature. America, he argued, is closer to the mainland of Europe than is Britain. The American writer must seek out his resources there. Largely through James, American literature was becoming freshly American and yet French in manner. Ford's example was young Stephen Crane--who could read no French but confessed to Ford that he had "read ol' man James."[2]

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[1]Hueffer, Henry James: A Critical Study, 140-141.

[2]Ford Maddox Hueffer, Thus to Revisit (London, 1921), 102-128.

Obviously, Ford saw little hope in the movement for westward orientation. That he saw Henry James as a prophet who was blazing a trail for modern literature is obvious in his critical study of James--and even more obvious in his own novels, especially the four Tietjens novels.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CONSERVATIVE PERIODICALS

John Morley thought the reviews to be "the center for the best observation of fresh-flowing currents of thought, interest, and debate" in the nineteenth century.[1] The claim has a touch of the kind of hyperbole we might expect from one of the greatest of Victorian journalists. Especially in scanning the literary criticism tucked away in the thousands of volumes of Victorian periodicals, we are reminded of the limitations and temporality of periodical publication. Anyone who can count even a half-dozen hours spent in looking through back numbers of the Quarterly, the Westminster, or the Pall Mall Gazette will feel attracted to Henry James's remark to Stevenson: "Nothing lifts its hand in these islands save blackguard party politics. Criticism is of an abject density and puerility--it doesn't exist...."[2]

But Morley is partly right. Even in literature and cultural theory one can find revealing things in the journals. The trick is simple: keep an eye out for drifts and trends, for sudden shifts and contradictions, for the bizarre and the incisively intelligent--and let the remaining ninety per cent fly on past.

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[1] Quoted from Morley's Memoirs by Merle Bevington, The Saturday Review (New York, 1941), ii.

[2] Henry James, Letters, I, 139.

The cultural conservatives, perhaps more than any other group in Victorian England, had their party periodicals. The king of them all was, of course, the Quarterly--strongly and deliberately a Tory political mouthpiece. There was also Blackwood's Magazine, a monthly which specialized in slashing, stinging attacks. The Saturday Review was not officially Tory, and it was less "political" and more literary than the Quarterly and Blackwood's; but its tone was generally Peel Tory. Its fear of the democratic "mob" was extreme, and turned the magazine against Disraeli.[1] The Edinburgh Review remained throughout the century the staunch voice of the old Whigs. In a sense this makes it a "liberal" periodical; but in literature it was, as we shall see, deeply conservative. It falls more naturally into a chapter on conservative periodicals. The Nineteenth Century, like the Saturday Review, was without official editorial policy, but its tone and spirit was generally anti-liberal Tory democrat. The National Review was a late-century throwback to Tory traditionalism.

I.

We could hardly expect Whitman to gain much favorable attention from the venerable old Quarterly. Up to the middle of the century, it had been as hostile to American writing as had Blackwood's, regarding democracy as an evil not to be trusted and its

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[1] Cf. Merle Bevington, The Saturday Review.

literature as insignificant. It was, after all, a journal devoted to defending the Established Order and the interests of the landed aristocracy. Under the editorship of Crocker, it had lamented the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832. Still, we must remember that the Quarterly was often (though Crocker was not) more Burkean than reactionary; that it had championed the Lake School; that it was more receptive to novelty in literature than was its rival, the Whig Edinburgh--because, Professor Graham suggests, it had to "differ somehow" from the Edinburgh; that Whitwell Elwin, who replaced Crocker in 1856, was a renegade Whig who became a moderate, flexible Tory under the gentle influence of Newman; and that the second half of the century saw its pages graced with the writings of Matthew Arnold, Mark Pattison, Thackeray, Harriet Martineau, John Addington Symonds, Swinburne, Austin Dobson, Bertrand Dobell, and Sir Sidney Lee.[1]

The fact is, the Quarterly praised Whitman. With precocious perceptiveness, it attacked his poses; it found his hostility to art inexcusable; fortunately, the reviewer pointed out, his performance has an accidental art of its own. In fact, "in creative force and imaginative vigour Whitman stands, in our opinion, first among American poets."[2]

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[1] Cf. Walter Graham, English Literary Periodicals (New York, 1930), 245-250; Quarterly Review (Centennial issue), CCXI (July, 1909), 279-324.

[2] CLXIII (Oct., 1886), 390-392.

Underlying this judgment is a rarely articulate understanding of the split character of American literature. In a keen and intelligent article, the Quarterly[1] examined the question of the orientation of American literature. It noticed the two schools forming in America--the "cultured school" and the "democratic school." The cultured school, says the anonymous writer, produces flowers bleached by culture. There is in this literature mastery of art-forms, refined thought, heightened moral tone, fluency, and crispness; but there is "little depth of light and shade." The soil in which it grows is never rank or coarse, but neither is it rich or deep. This literature lacks gusto, relish of life; "dainty perfection of expression is no substitute for stimulating thought." The Quarterly's preference is for the literature of the democratic school. Earlier in the century, conditions were not right for this literature. The nationalist movement in America was premature. "Republicanism produced equality, but it was an equality of mediocrity.... An unlimited right of private judgment led, not to independence but to idolatry of the aggregate mass." But now the times are ready for a flourishing of significant literature from the democratic school. Ease, leisure, refinement, and culture have slowly grown and matured in America. There is a new confidence, reflected by Whitman, and less overshadowing by Britain. The new literature is here; it is full of human interest,

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[1] Quarterly Review, CLXIII (Oct., 1886), 363-94.

a realistic literature. This literature, the article concludes, will probably set the pace for the modern world; it better meets the needs of the modern world.

If it seems inconsistent for a Tory periodical to support Whitman's isolationist and democratic orientation while looking down with detached amusement at the attempt for a "cultured" American literature, at least the inconsistency is fairly consistent. Up until 1900, the Quarterly remained cool towards James. Its best study of him serves well as a summary of the accumulated reviews. It is found in a well-packed twenty-eight page article on "American Novels."[1]

This article appeared shortly after Howell's unwise adulation of James at the expense of Dickens and Thackeray. For this reason, some of its acidity may have to be discounted.

The Quarterly saw no good reason for James's attachment to Europe. It again affirmed the Quarterly's faith in the westward orientation of American literature. It pointed to the boundless range of opportunities for the writer in New England, the Spanish settlements, the West, and the Civil War.[2] Most American writers, the article suggests, "owe too much to European 'culture' or influences." Only Bret Harte is freed from this indictment.[3] The American writer is really in an ideal situation;

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[1] CLV (Jan., 1883), 201-229.

[2] Ibid., pp. 202-3. [3] Ibid., p. 203.

> It must be his own fault if he does not succeed, for the opportunities before him are boundless. America is the land of Romance....[1]

In fact, the Quarterly did not regard James as an American novelist at all. Poe had already begun diverting the stream of American literature; even so, it was carried on by William Gilmore Simms, Sylvester Judd, Cooper, Paulding, and John P. Kennedy.[2] But the novels of the "new school" "are not American and are not novels."[3] The work of a real American novelist must be "soaked in national feeling." It must have the tang of Charles Brockden Brown: "He was a true American, for whom America was good enough to live in."[4]

The article is finally a strong plea for simple realism and the use of native materials in American literature. James, the writer complains, is artificial. He does not know Americans. "The great masters of the craft"--Dickens and Thackeray have doubtless again come to mind--"did not find real life insipid."[5] James does. His books, as a result, are "dull, unspeakably dull"; they are all pill and no sugar, replete with "artificial mannerisms" and "tawdry smartness." Portrait of a Lady (which has no beginning, middle, or end, no plot or story, "not a single interesting incident in it") yields an almost endless elaboration of

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[1] CLV, 202.

[2] Ibid., 206-7. [3] Ibid., 209. [4] Ibid., 202.

[5] Ibid.

conversation simply because this filled space, and space, for an author appearing serially, meant money.[1]

Perhaps this is enough to indicate an odd turning of the tables in the Quarterly: a British Tory organ praising Whitman, the democratic bard, and rejecting James, the refined and cultured traditionalist. The grounds in both cases were grounds essentially compatible with democratic art; a concern for the reading masses is reflected in the myriad of words like sugar, story, interest, national feeling.

Strangely enough, these comments on American literature appeared while the Quarterly was under a good deal of domination by Lord Salisbury, a strong Tory who thoroughly disliked Disraeli because he felt that Disraeli was leading the party into a dangerous flirtation with democracy which would rush the nation towards anarchy.

Stranger still, by the time the Quarterly revised its opinion of James and praised him as a major novelist, it had already lost much of its Tory identity. After 1900, the old principle of anonymity (and a good deal of conservative editorial policy) had died. In 1903 and again in 1910 the Quarterly published signed articles on James; now he had come into favor.

In a twenty-two page article, "The Novels of Mr. Henry James," Oliver Elton,[2] skillfully analyzed the development of

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[1]CLV, 214.

[2]CXCVIII (Oct., 1903), 358-80.

James up to The Wings of the Dove. He presented James as one of the great artists of the century and displayed shrewd insight into James's aims, limitations, themes, and techniques. The article reveals a flash of insight into James's dispatriation:

> He is not a cosmopolitan even yet; he never was one. He is better; he understands other countries, but does not adopt them; for his last heroine, the 'Dove,' is the soul of New England, his own country.[1]

Morton Fullerton, one of the best of James's critics among his contemporaries, completely reversed the stand that the Quarterly had taken on James twenty-seven years earlier. In a more liberal Quarterly, Fullerton made a more aristocratically oriented defense of James against the charges of Philistine and democratic critics.[2] Like Elton, he sensed the necessity of James's dispatriation. It was demanded by a new and fruitful literary subject: the meeting of the New World and the Old. First of all, wrote Fullerton, James has been

> the historiographer of that vast epic--the modern Iliad, when its peripatetic and romantic elements do not make it more like an Odyssey--the clash between two societies, the mutual call of two sundered worlds....[3]

But more important is the reversal of standards, the defense of James in the name of a more traditional and aristocratic sense of art. He thought it inevitable that James would be ignored "in this period of democratic neglect of all the superiorities." For

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[1] CXCVIII, 358.

[2] "The Art of Henry James," CCXII (April, 1910), 393-409.

[3] Ibid., 398.

the mind of the modern reader, blunted by mass literature,

> made myopic by the thin transcriptions of life which pass for fiction, has no perception of tone, depth, richness, and completeness of representation.[1]

James's devotion to art in a democratic and commercial age was to Fullerton nobly exemplary. James could resist the drifts and pressures. He even had the courage, at the end of an illustrious career, to follow the dictates of his artistic sense and change his style.

> The great danger that besets the artist is the peril of popularity, and the all-too seductive appeal to outdo himself, to abound still more in the same sense. It is at his risk that he leaves his admirers in the lurch.... The secret of continued success is not to disturb the spectator's association of ideas.... It requires courage to ignore this instant value of the trade-mark; for not only gratified vanity but uneasy self-criticism urges that the public may be right. Henry James had this high courage; and to it we owe the fact that he has become...one of those '_premiers parmi les plus grands_' with whom Hugo classed Balzac.[2]

II.

The _Quarterly_ saw value and significance in Whitman and finally came around to respecting James. We can surmise that in the shift of critical standards after 1900 it would have turned against Whitman. But neither of these authors fared well at any time in the pages of another Tory-leaning journal, the _Saturday Review_.

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[1] "The Art of Henry James," 397.

[2] _Ibid._, 395-396.

Founded in 1855 by a Peel Tory, its conservative but non-partisan tone was set in the early volumes by the articles of Walter Bagehot. The Saturday acknowledged the need of reforms, but jealously guarded English institutions and fought off fearfully any concessions to "the democratic mob." It called continually for the preservation of institutions and for minority rule because "the offspring of democracy is tyranny."[1] Disraeli was despised as insincere, Gladstone as a traitor to learning and tradition who was bending the knee to radicalism and the mob. The British laborer would have to become considerably advanced in education and independence before the nation could listen to Bright; until then "the British Constitution very sensibly provides that he shall be governed by his betters."[2]

But the Saturday became gradually less political and more literary, broadening and liberalizing its policy at the same time. Indeed, for a five-year period in the 1890's the review was edited by the radical Frank Harris, and featured the writings of Shaw, Wells, Symonds, Beerbohm, and Cunninghame-Graham. Still, prior to Harris's stint, the movement away from conservatism was slow and gradual.

As Merle Bevington's study of the Saturday shows, in its early years it expressed in general an aristocratic contempt for

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[1] VII (Jan. 8, 1859), 35.

[2] XVII (Jan. 16, 1864), 71-72.

American vulgarity and crudeness. But after a few years "its critiques indicated considerable respect for American literature and its future possibilities."[1]

The Saturday's early attitude towards American literature seems to fluctuate between amused contempt for bloodless imitations and actual outrage at the vulgarity of traditionless Yankees. Coventry Patmore complained of "the vast dead level of decent verse, such as happily we shall in vain look for in any other time or country," and cited Longfellow's "Excelsior" and "The Psalm of Life" as being "remarkable chiefly for blunders in morality, confusion of thought, bombastic and commonplace sentiment, and inaccuracy of observation and expression." Democracy, Patmore argued, was responsible for the watering down.[2] A year later, the Saturday sneered at the imitativeness of American fiction, a reflection of "a shallowness and thinness in the American character." Again the reviewer moved on to the question of orientation in American culture:

> It will seem a paradox only to very shallow and very hasty observers to assert that a landed aristocracy, an established church, and a vast and complicated system of proprietary rights and dignities...are amongst the strongest of all guarantees for independence and strength of mind.[3]

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[1]Kincheloe, p. 23, summarizing Bevington.

[2]IV (Aug. 15, 1857), 165-166.

[3]VI (Aug. 23, 1858), 215-216.

The paradox is a fairly profound one: if America were more like England, her literature would be less imitative of English literature, more "native" and national. It might be noted that the conservative Saturday had a warmer regard for the distinctively American literature of Lowell, Artemus Ward, and Mark Twain than it had for the more conventional literature of Longfellow, Irving, and Bryant.

The change in attitude towards American literature began after the Civil War, in 1868. The previous year, the Saturday began running monthly articles on American writing. But in this early period, when the critiques were marked by a demand for American originality and yet by a conviction that democratic institutions stunted literature, the Saturday gave three reviews to Whitman--"original" and "democratic." All three of them were decidedly unfavorable.

The first of the reviews of Whitman, which appeared in Volume I and was one of four British reviews of the first edition of Leaves of Grass, was by Sir Henry Sumner Maine. Maine, an influential member of the original Saturday group and a prolific contributor to the review, was one of the keenest of conservative intellectuals of his time.[1] A talented disciple of Burke, he registered his opposition to American-type democracy in a still-valuable treatise, Popular Government. In his articles on

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[1]For a discussion of Maine's conservatism, see Benjamin E. Lippencott, Victorian Critics of Democracy.

American literature, Maine demonstrated his conviction that the social structure of America precludes literature. For Whitman he had no use at all, and suggested that anyone coming into possession of a copy of Leaves of Grass ought to burn it.[1] The other reviews of Whitman before 1868 were equally hostile. Only once did the Saturday except Whitman from its attack on "feeble and derivative" American poetry.[2] When W. M. Rossetti's edition of Whitman appeared in 1868, the Saturday took comfort in the belief that literature would not be harmed by it, for Whitman is strong "only in the sense in which an onion is strong."[3]

But from 1868 to the end of the century, while the Saturday was finding hope and some achievement in American literature generally, it maintained its stand on Whitman. Largely because his writing was "obscene," he did not deserve the financial help for which Buchanan was pleading in 1876.[4] In 1889, in a review of November Boughs,[5] the old Toryism is as strong as ever. The reviewer found it necessary to "confess that this strayed reveller...is a poet still, and one of the remarkably few poets that his country has produced." But his country remains impotent,

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[1] Saturday Review, I (March 15, 1856), 394.

[2] XXIV (Sept. 21, 1867), 383-4.

[3] XXV (May 2, 1868), 590.

[4] XLI (March 18, 1876), 360-1.

[5] LXVII (March 2, 1889), 261.

starved by its own democratic structure.

> So far is it from being the case that the United States of America present a higher type of civilization and of humanity, that we should count the grey New Yorker rather lower than the European child. Democracy, instead of being a great and beautiful goddess, is a dirty, half-witted trull.

The muse Whitman invokes is precisely this half-witted trull:

> If (Whitman) will, in season and out of season, praise an irrational variety of polity, which has never yet been tried with real success in any age of the world's history, he must lay his account with harsh answers from people who utterly decline to sacrifice the freedom of forty-nine wise men to the tyranny of fifty-one fools.

That there must be a new modern literature the Saturday vigorously denied. There is no such thing as progress in poetry.

> No; let us, if it be ours to lecture on poetry, hold up Walt Whitman as much as anyone pleases for an awful example of the fate that waits, and justly waits, on those who think (idle souls!) that there is such a thing as progress in poetry, and that because you have steam-engines and other things which Solomon and Sappho had not, you may, nay must, neglect the lessons of Sappho and Solomon.

Henry James fared only slightly better with the Saturday's reviewers. In a way this is surprising. Hawthorne had been well received by them, even when attacking English women in Our Old Home.[1] And in 1867, the Saturday[2] seemed ready for James in a way in which no other review was ready for him. It detected a new maturity making its way into American letters; the vehicle

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[1] Bevington, pp. 270-2.

[2] XXIV (Nov. 9, 1867), 607-8.

for this maturity was cosmopolitanism. The reviewer found this cosmopolitanism, this maturity, in Howells' Venetian Life. He found it also in Holmes's Guardian Angel, which won the reviewer's praise because it was clearly the work of one of the few Americans "who have clearly got beyond the pupil stage, and established claims to be judged from a cosmopolitan point of view." Then too, James as a stylist might have satisfied the reviewer who complained nine months earlier[1] about American books having

> certain blemishes of style, a certain slovenliness of grammar and clumsiness of expression, derived from the colloquial idioms of the country.

But the Saturday missed James. It missed the fact that he was attempting to establish a European orientation for American literature. For one thing, the review was distracted from the center of James by its persistent regard for moral decency. Thus, while making the first comparison of James and Turgenev and noting the "delicacy" of James's treatment of his subject, the reviewer of The American[2] raised his eyebrow at the career of Mlle. Nioche, "not a pleasant theme." James's French Poets and Novelists was attacked for giving eight pages to the love affair described in Baudelaire's Elle et Lui (all of Baudelaire, the Saturday sniffed, is not worth this much space);[3] In the Cage was dismissed as

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[1] XXIII (Feb. 23, 1867), 247.

[2] XLIV (June 16, 1877), 433.

[3] XLV (April 20, 1878), 504-5.

"unclean."[1]

The Saturday said a great deal about James, but little of it was out of the ordinary. The reviewers did not sense the relationship between James's novels and the conservative concern for standards in modern art. In James's Hawthorne, where the problem of orientation cannot be missed, the Saturday simply agreed that the solitary writer, without "class," was in for a hard time.[2] It missed the theme of the dedicated artist in The Tragic Muse[3] and thought that James, in The Lesson of the Master, was trying to say simply that good authors cannot be married.[4] It joined the noisy parade of critics who found James "too highly cultivated" to deal in "the elementary feelings of human nature";[5] he lacked story and real life; he tried too hard to be "exact about nothing";[6] his stories seemed unfinished.[7] It got in its lick about James's sentence structure, dubbing the James sentence as "the trailing and over-jointed abomination."[8]

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[1] LXXXVI (Sept. 3, 1898), 320.

[2] XLIX (Jan. 10, 1880), 60.

[3] LXX (Aug. 2, 1890), 141.

[4] LXXIII (May 14, 1892), 575.

[5] XLVII (May 3, 1879), 560.

[6] "The Novelist's Art and Mr. Henry James," XCV (Jan. 17, 1903), 79-80.

[7] LXVIII (July 13, 1889), 48.

[8] LXXVI (July 8, 1893), 46.

III.

The comments of Blackwood's Magazine on American literature reveal something of the stolid British middle class capitalist-conservatism at work. If Blackwood's is Tory, we must note again the different meanings that this word had in the nineteenth century. Its alignment was not with the aristocracy, but with the new and powerful middle class. It was pro-laissez-faire and blatantly anti-intellectual. It rejected Carlyle and Ruskin because they would dangerously increase that grim menace to the middle classes, government regulation. Unlike many of the organs of the middle class, however, it attacked Darwin, Renan, and Huxley, opposed Mill's empiricism, and held to Biblical infallibility. It even attacked Arnold's Literature and Dogma.

Blackwood's is almost as interesting for what it overlooked as for what it reviewed. It was, after all, a hard, practical, "serious" review. It gave little space to novels. Dickens, in the whole of the century, was reviewed only three times; Thackeray and Meredith once; Hardy not at all. Poetry was almost gleefully flaunted. In Memoriam, Dramatis Personae, Empedocles on Etna, Arnold's Poems, Second Series and New Poems, and all of Swinburne and Meredith went unnoticed. Strange for a "Tory" journal, there were no reviews of Shooting Niagara or Culture and Anarchy.[1]

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[1]MacDonald Williams, "Blackwood's Magazine: A Selective and Critical Bibliography of Reviews" in Diss. Abs., XX, 2815-17.

Blackwood's did not deign to mention Whitman. It did on occasion review Henry James. In a long article in 1879,[1] it attempted to estimate James on the basis of Roderick Hudson, The American, The Europeans, Daisy Miller, and An International Episode. The reviewer's rather strange conclusion is that, while James is not quite a flag-waver, he is to be suspected of "the very warm and determined purpose to elevate his countrymen in the eyes of the world." The stories have some success as "essays of national revelation," but James tips the scales in favor of his American characters. The charge was repeated three years later.[2] James was accused of trying to show "the predominance of the great American race, and the manner in which it has over-run and conquered the Old World." But, sneered the reviewer, as though he were catching James for the first time in a terrible blunder, most of James's characters--all of them in Portrait of a Lady--are really anti-republicans, in Europe to escape republicanism. A year later Blackwood's accused both James and Howells of American provincialism.[3]

IV.

The files of the Edinburgh Review serve well to remind us

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[1] CXXVI (July, 1879), 100-107.

[2] CXXXI (March, 1882), 375.

[3] CXXXIII (Jan. 1883), 136-161.

that criticism cannot be stereotyped as "liberal" or "conservative." When it was founded in 1802, it was, of course, a Whig instrument. Literature was one of its legs, Jeffry told Walter Scott, "but its right leg is politics."[1] It remained Whig throughout the century, long after Whiggery had been attenuated into Liberalism. When it was founded, it was no more a part of the reactionary fear of French Revolution change than it was an advocate of French Revolution radicalism. It kept this balance throughout the century. The best and firmest note the Edinburgh struck was the note of moderation. The controlling mind of the Edinburgh was not imaginative; it was not carried by enthusiasms; but unlike many middle-class liberal minds, it was also suspicious of theories. Walter Bagehot's cautious restatement of the Edinburgh's policy catches it just right: the review was built on the conviction that "the present world can and should be quietly improved."[2] The word quietly is important. It stood for "plain Whig principles" instead of radicalism, and the standard was severe enough to make the Edinburgh suspicious even of Gladstone.

In fact, the Edinburgh managed very often to detach itself from the political, moral, and literary standards of the rising middle class. This is strikingly apparent in its attitudes towards American literature, as we shall see. Six years before

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[1]Quoted by Cairns, II, 12.

[2]Works and Life of Walter Bagehot, ed. Russell Barrington (London, 1915), II, 62.

Tocqueville, it had raised the question of the tyranny of the majority; in reviewing Tocqueville, it had singled out not democracy but "commercial, middle-class" forces as the real threat to human society, and had suggested as a cure for America and the modern world the girding and strengthening of "an agricultural class, a leisured class, and a learned class."[1] The Edinburgh was seldom in a mood to let the middle classes have their way in shaping the new and shifting world.

Still, the Edinburgh reflected a good deal of what we now call "typically Victorian" hostility to change and novelty in literature. Until 1829, when Macvey Napier replaced Jeffry as editor, the review was stamped with an emaciated classicism. Campbell and Rogers were valued above the romantics. Some of this unbending fealty to dying critical standards remained throughout the century. New ideas in literature were as disconcerting as noisy new doctrines in politics. It is one of the many paradoxes of the century that the Tory Quarterly was really more hospitable to novelty than the more liberal Edinburgh.

What did such a review, with such critical standards, make of American civilization and literature? To begin with, the Edinburgh did take a great deal of interest in America. Tradition has it that the review's blue and buff colors were modeled after George Washington's uniform. It attacked British participation

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[1]See above, p. 62.

in the War of 1812,[1] tried to correct the image of America from the distorting onslaught of forty-four different travel books, commended American public education as its "distinguishing excellence,"[2] applauded the sectarianism of American religious life,[3] saw great opportunities for a nation free from feudalism[4]--and yet felt that American democracy had little chance of succeeding. The feeling, in brief, was that legislation _for_ the people is good, but legislation _by_ the people is questionable.[5]

The same mixture of keen interest and hesitancy can be traced in the _Edinburgh's_ century-long span of comments on American literature. American books were not reviewed extensively because the review's policy was to deal only with those books which could be made the text of more general essays. But a consistent theme runs through most of the review articles touching on American literature. It is a theme that might be more natural to the _Quarterly_, for its essence is that literature requires leisure--perhaps even a leisured class. Second to this theme is another: that American literature is merely imitative, lacking in national peculiarity.

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[1] XX, 451.

[2] LVI (1833), 461.

[3] X (1807), 199.

[4] XL (1824), 430.

[5] _Ibid_.

Already in 1809 the Edinburgh pointed out that Americans were too pre-occupied to produce a literature.[1] A year later the review had comparatively kind words for Joel Barlow's bombastic and generally ridiculed long poem, The Columbiad.[2] The reviewer had his eye peeled for something "distinctive." However, he also commented upon the environmental restrictions against which Barlow and Timothy Dwight had to struggle. The Edinburgh's plea for something distinctive from free America and its constant complaint that American writers were imitators were often followed by comments on the absence of tradition and past in American life. One reviewer quite typically found a want of "the sublimity of moral associations" and of "a long and picturesque train of old recollections and associations."[3] Still, the literature should not be imitative, should not rely on European associations. And Poe was too much for the moral sensibilities of the Edinburgh: he was visciously attacked as a worthless Bohemian vagabond, a "delirious drunken pauper."[4] Bryant and Lowell, on the other hand, were not distinctive enough.[5]

The Edinburgh's whole attitude towards American literature

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[1] XV, 24.

[2] XVII (1810), 321-326.

[3] L (1829), 127.

[4] CVII (1858), 419-442.

[5] CXCI (1900), 181.

was in nicely sensitive balance between the demands for a new and distinctive voice and the respect for tradition and roots and "a class." Whitman was a vigorous challenge to that balance. But for some reason--perhaps for this very reason--the review chose to ignore his work for fifty-four years. It finally got round to him in 1910, but said little except that Whitman had fallen into "the snare of romanticism."[1] In overlooking Whitman and Twain, the Edinburgh missed the very distinctiveness it was so impatiently waiting for.

Despite the fact that he was Europeanized, James was unquestionably distinctive. His books also lend themselves as text to a possible Edinburgh article on the need for classes in the modern world. And indeed, the review recognized both these characteristics in James. In an 1882 review,[2] the Edinburgh argued again the need of a cultivated class in America and showed with some effectiveness how this need was given constant expression in the work of Henry Adams, Howells, and James. James, said the reviewer, commenting on The Europeans, had to bring Europeans into his American work to give Boston society "needful animation." His problem was a severe one: he had to write in a cultural wilderness. And at this point the reviewer saw something of James's distinctiveness: he is authentically American, and a patriot of

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[1] CCXI (1910), 347.

[2] CLVI (1882), 170-203.

his country, but one who realizes that he cannot in good conscience make a home-spun novel readable. For James, of course, this was only a small part of the problem. But at least the Edinburgh saw a real part of it.

Perhaps James was too thin to be part of the Edinburgh's steady diet. Whatever the reason, he was reviewed only once again, this time[1] after James had entered his "major phase" and after the critical attitude towards him was shifting. But the Edinburgh's twenty-six page article says surprisingly little, most of it ordinary. Significantly, the reviewer set out to discover "how much of life" there is in the novels of James. He found increasing power and delicacy in the chain of seventeen novels; he praised James's eye for "involutions of the mind"; he found amplitude and range; but like so many critics, he was disturbed by James's "lack of depth."

V.

We should look briefly at some select notices from other Tory-inclined journals: The Dublin Review, The National Review, The Nineteenth Century, and the British Quarterly.

James's art-versus-life theme usually went unnoticed as a statement of his vision of the times. The Dublin Review,[2] a

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[1] CXCXII (1903), 59-85.

[2] XXIV (Oct., 1890), 466-7.

conservative Irish Catholic journal, did notice the theme and hit it hard. It seemed to the reviewer an apology for "professional aesthetes." The disgust for Gabriel Nash is understandable, for James was obviously satirizing him; but the review went on to castigate Nick Dormer, describing him as

> a contemptible creature with aesthetic proclivities, who throws up a promising parliamentary career to potter over an easel....

The Dublin, always sensitive to "immorality" in James, carried this theme right down through its last review of him in 1911.[1] The obscurity of James's style, the reviewer decided, was due simply to "moral confusion."

The British Quarterly found Whitman's poetry to be "prose" which is "feebler than Tupper and coarser than Swinburne at his coarsest."[2] It was one of the first reviews to recognize James's international theme,[3] but failed to see its implications; the reviewer thought "the moral" of the theme to be that if English nobles cannot marry American girls, then "it is not very honorable to entangle their affections."

The Nineteenth Century, a Tory Democrat review which was liberal in its attitude towards the laboring classes but anti-Liberal Party, published one good article on Whitman. By George C.

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[1] XLVIII (Jan. 1911), 200-201.

[2] LXXXII (Feb., 1885), 319.

[3] XLIX (April, 1879), 267.

Macaulay, it is a balanced, informative discussion of Whitman's art and thought.[1] But it does little to relate Whitman to the art and society of his times.

The National Review, an old-school traditionalist Tory journal edited by Alfred Austin, dismissed James as anaemic. With a surprising indulgence in middle class standards, probably reflecting some of the elan of the vitalism and imperialism which was beginning to move Kipling, the review called for some more "hearty English fare," some passion and "downright vulgarity."[2] More of the National's attitude towards American writing--this time on Whitman--can be found in an article on American poetry which Austin published[3] before the National was founded. In speculating on the poetry of the future, Austin mixed acidity with gloom. After discussing briefly Whitman's moral offensiveness, he sallied forth into democratic art and the westward orientation--for these seemed clearly to be ahead.

> As Mr. Rossetti reminds us, it has been said of Mr. Whitman by one of his warmest admirers, "He is Democracy." We really think he is--in his composition, at least; being, like it, ignorant, sanguine, noisy, coarse, and chaotic! Democracy may be, and we fear is, our proximate future; and it will, as a matter of course, bring its poetry along with it. The prospect is not an agreeable one; but, as a protection against both it and the present condition [of poetry], we

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[1] XII (Dec., 1882), 903-918.

[2] XIV (Oct., 1889), 167-170.

[3] "The Poetry of the Future," Temple Bar, XXVII (Oct., 1869), 314-327.

can always fall back upon the grand old masters of the Past, from whom it is quite certain that singers, whether insipid or insane, will never succeed in weaning the healthy opinion of mankind.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PROGRESSIVE VICTORIANS: THE MIDDLE CLASS, LIBERALS, AND RADICALS

Industrialization and the Reform Bills had created, by the second half of the nineteenth century, a totally new and still-changing society dominated by the middle classes. The very word industrial is a clue to the temperament of this society: a quality of human behavior had become institutionalized.

After the word transition, the key word was progress. Indeed, for the less reflective economic liberals the sense of transition never came to life; the idea of progress dominated everything. But when progress was the axiom, its corollaries had to be stated with words such as democracy, class, utility, freedom, society. Whatever the discussion, whatever the point of view taken in a discussion, some reference to the "progressive," "free," "democratic" society growing up in the social laboratory of the New World could be expected. The solid and stolid middle classes as well as the anti-middle class liberals and the social radicals felt compelled to look at America.

When the discussions of this transitory age veered towards art and culture and literature, the question demanded by the times was obvious: What kind of civilization, what kind of culture, what kind of art and literature should "progress" bring into being? Even after we exclude the social and cultural conservatives,

the answers to the question are surprisingly various. We can group them, however, into three general categories: the answers given by the conventional, moralistic, generally utilitarian "solid" middle class, by the moderate anti-middle class liberals, and by the radical social revolutionary democrats.

I.

The hard core of middle class Victorians was at the center of Victorian social life. But at the same time it counted for little in the culture and literature of the age. The middle classes were busy demanding and creating a market for and getting "popular culture." Their demands and standards certainly modified the real literature that the age produced; Tennyson and Dickens and even Arnold were part of the "Victorian compromise." But most of the enduring thought and art of the age was not engagée with the standards and outlook of the middle class. Even Tennyson was not, and surely Browning, Arnold, Carlyle, Newman, George Eliot, the Pre-Raphaelites, and Hardy were not. Writers were consciously either addressing or flaunting the middle class, but they were seldom wholly representative of it. Hence the important criticism, like the important thought and literature, comes from somewhere outside the solid center of Victorian society.

The solid middle class "Philistine" attitude towards culture and literature is well enough known. We will touch only briefly on that attitude as it related to American culture and literature. The valuable and worthwhile documents are hard to find because

even Victorian periodicals were in some way above or outside of (and were instructing or attacking) the solid middle class.

The middle class, too, for all its smugness and complacency and self-righteousness, had to look occasionally (over its fan, so to speak) at its bustling cousin in America. Tennyson, who often struck the right chord for the middle class hearth, caught the tone of interest in his "Hands all Round":

> Gigantic daughter of the West,
> We drink to thee across the flood...
> For art thou not of English blood?

American books, as we have seen, were tremendously popular in Victorian England.[1] The Victorian critics, conscious of the feelings of their middle class readers, pretty well abandoned slashing attacks on American literature by about 1850. The position they settled down to reflects the general attitude of the solid middle class. It has been summarized by Henderson G. Kincheloe:[2] they preferred literature which did not depart too far from the "normal" and usual in matter and manner; overwhelmingly, therefore, they preferred Longfellow and Holmes to Melville and Whitman and James. Really little more need be said.

We might pause for a moment to remind ourselves why the solid middle class Victorians brought American books into their

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[1] Cf. Gohdes, American Literature in Nineteenth Century England.

[2] "British Periodical Criticism of American Literature, 1851-1870." Thesis, Duke University, 1948.

parlors. They were not seeking ideological insights, as were the more radical liberals. They simply recognized that the United States, earlier than any other country in the world, had produced a literature which was entirely the product of a great middle class. It was a literature written for people, not for the salons and the aristoi. If we put ourselves in their place we can see that they would feel naturally what editors and teachers and scholars must tell us: that Emerson wrote for and about representative men rather than heroes; that Hawthorne wrote for children; that Poe preferred the short story to the poem because its products are more vast, "more appreciable by the mass of mankind";[1] that Mark Twain deliberately ignored the cultivated classes and, as he said, "hunted for bigger game--the masses."[2]

There were, of course, some standards other than mass appeal and readability and "the normal and usual." Another major standard, as everyone knows, was a rigid sense of moral purity. On these four grounds alone, Whitman would be ostracized and James quietly ignored. The Graphic can serve as an illustration of the taste to which it geared itself: Whitman was not mentioned at all. James was attacked at various times for his "high tone" and his "complex departures from the recognized methods of fiction";[3]

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[1] "On Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales," in Foerster and Charvat, American Poetry and Prose (Boston, 1952), p. 212.

[2] Letters, ed. A. B. Paine (New York, 1917), II, 527.

[3] XXXIX (June 29, 1889), 714.

for his preoccupation with "the bizarre and morbid in mental states";[1] for his solemnity and seriousness;[2] he has, the Graphic assured its readers, no appeal for the reader "who has no ambition to pose as 'superior.'"[3] Temple Bar found in James "a want of red blood" and thought him "too clever by half."[4] James's "pessimism" and "cynicism" were also offensive to the code; Temple Bar identified American literature with optimism and found Twain's humor "thoroughly American" because it is "never cynical."[5]

This is really enough. We will find the heavy weight of the middle class code overlaying the criticism of the more important reviews, reviews which in many ways transcended middle class mentality but never fully escaped middle class demands.

There were also the oddities and extremes of the middle class mind. The evangelicals and non-conformists, for example, had their little periodicals, dedicated to temperance and purity. One of them, the Congregationalist Eclectic Review, which seems to have liked Harriet Beecher Stowe and Whittier better than any other writers in the century, sailed into Melville at full speed for having said uncomplimentary things about hard-working

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[1] XI (March 27, 1875), 299.

[2] XXXIII (April 3, 1886), 378.

[3] Ibid.

[4] LXX (March, 1884), 388.

[5] XXXVII (Feb., 1873), 402.

Christian missionaries in Tahiti. And there was Arnold's straw-man, Sir Lepel Griffin, who disliked everything in American literature for opposite reasons (Whitman is a barbarian, Howells is "milk and water," and so forth) and thought that the thing most worth seeing in the United States was the pork-packing industry in Chicago. But there is no value to match the amusement of going into such things.

The solid middle class had narrow, utilitarian, didactic tastes. But these tastes were instrumental largely in the limitations they imposed upon the tastes of others. They were seldom elaborated or defended. The inhabitants of the solid middle class read the safe and popular Americans and gave little thought to the question of orientation.

II.

Not all Liberal commentary on American Literature was as smug and myopic as that in the Graphic. Even the utilitarian middle classes had their moments of intelligence; they were not all Bounderbies or Gradgrinds; Mrs. Grundy and Dr. Bowdler did not have the Victorian parlor to themselves. The sense of transition and the quest for orientation were stronger, of course, among those Liberals who could disassociate themselves from the merely mechanical or thoughtless standards of a self-interested class. Non-middle-class, and even anti-middle-class Liberals were in abundance, "liberal," yet distinguishable from the socialists.

Yet in many respects the Spectator does not represent much of a jump from the hard middle class core. In many ways an intelligent weekly, it tended to reduce art to a sub-department of morals. Apparently the first thing a reviewer was expected to look for in a new book was "immorality"; if he found it, his job was to let loose a pained outcry of moral indignation. Something of the solid middle class veneration for that which is practical and energetic is present in the Spectator files, too, particularly after the guiding mind of Richard Holt Hutton had left. It is in this late-century stage, for example, that the Spectator showed its disgust with Henry James's concern with such things as social class, things "which...have done little for England in comparison with the ships of the Pool and the spade of the engineer."[1]

Still, it would not be just to dismiss the Spectator on such grounds alone. In the twenty-odd years in which it was edited by Hutton and Meredith Townsend, it was generally a serious and intelligent periodical which had no partisan obligations but very definite Liberal leanings. It supported Gladstone until the Home Rule controversy in 1886 (and in exchange got his endorsement as "one of the few papers which are written in the fear and love of God."[2]). But its moralism, especially in Hutton's essays,

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[1]LVII (Feb. 2, 1884), 160.

[2]Quoted by Glyn N. Thomas, Richard Holt Hutton (Ann Arbor, 1949), 100.

transcended mere Victorian respectability. Hutton, who was one of the founders of the Metaphysical Society and a keen student of Newman, moved slowly from Unitarianism to High Anglicanism and very near to Roman Catholicism. Unlike the dispensers of middle class morality and respectability, Hutton built his ethics on a firm philosophical opposition to materialism. Hutton's higher philosophical purpose often broke through the rigid moralism of the paper. The depth and range of intellect in the paper makes it obvious that it was designed to be read not by the Philistines but by the cultured and educated.

This is not to suggest that the Spectator was free from excessive moralism--moralism at the expense of the larger criteria of literature. It scolded James for giving space in his French Poets and Novelists to Baudelaire, whose work seemed to the reviewer nothing but "gilded dunghills."[1] In reviewing The Europeans, it attacked the laxity of American morals, and somehow, incredibly, managed to identify the Baroness' "easy view" of marriage with New England culture.[2] James, indeed, was often attacked on the score of morality. Whitman was almost obliterated on the same score. The 1860 reviewer of Leaves of Grass suggested sarcastically that the cover of the book should have been decorated with phallic emblems, and the frontispiece should have been

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[1]LI (Aug. 24, 1878), 1076-7.

[2]LI (Oct. 26, 1879), 334-6.

a full-length portrait of Whitman, stark naked.[1]

But, moralism aside, what did the Spectator make of American literature? With what kind of sensitivity did this journal, liberal but non-utilitarian, with its eye on the drifts of the time in the realm of idea and belief, respond to the opposite orientations of Whitman and James?

For one thing, it could not quite remove itself from the growing insistence that literature should be interesting to and readable by the masses. Thus Hutton admired Longfellow for his "elemental simplicity"[2] while his magazine--perhaps Hutton himself--complained at great length of Whitman's confusion and obscurity.[3] James was often criticized as a "fine craftsman" who refuses to give his stories "the characteristic qualities of narration--simplicity, lucidity and a natural movement of incident."[4] Roderick Hudson seemed "dreary,"[5] The Bostonians tedious and long-winded.[6]

Much more significantly, the Spectator was ill at ease with the thinking that each of these writers represented. Neither of

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[1] XXXIII (July 14, 1860), 669.

[2] Reprinted in Hutton's Contemporary Thought and Thinkers (London, 1880), 76-87.

[3] LVII (July 21, 1883), 934.

[4] LXXV (Sept. 28, 1895), 405.

[5] LII (July 5, 1879), 854-5

[6] LIX (March 20, 1886), 388-9.

them offered the reviewers of the Spectator a tenable vision of reality to which man could go in retreat from the uncertainties of the age.

Whitman was regarded as being greatly over-rated. America, said the Spectator in 1860,[1] "is unreasonably impatient to possess a great national poet." The usual complaint about the lack of distinctiveness in American poetry is there; "all are exotics, and their roots are nurtured by pabulum imported from the old country." It is partly the eagerness for a distinctive poet that drives some "uncultured" Americans to make great claims for Whitman. But America's real difficulty is that the soil is not yet right for poetry; it has, in Holmes's phrase, "no sufficient flavour of humanity." At this point in the review the real attack on Whitman begins. It is not just some superficial sense of morality that makes Whitman unacceptable; his lawlessness and indecency spring from a mind that lacks understanding and "intellectual capital," and from Whitman's romantic notion that all is divine and that evil does not exist. Against this notion the Spectator protested with all its journalistic might. This was the wrong path, an idle dream at the foundation of Whitman's thought and form that made the whole structure sag and would finally bring it crashing down. America had to be patient and wait for her poet.

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[1] XXXIII (July 14, 1860), 669-670.

The Spectator attacked Whitman once again in 1883.[1] Again it seemed concerned that Whitman could attract a following. How could intelligent men regard as a prophet a man who is demonstrably "ignorant," who uses bad grammar, who has no manners, who knows no distinction between good and evil, whose days are "joined each to each in natural commonplace," and whose writing is saved from mere commonplace only by "its egotism, which makes it offensive"? The Spectator had an answer. Quoting Mill, the review explained that in an age of conformity the mere example of non-conformity is a great service. Whitman's defiance made him attractive. It was natural that he should receive momentary attention, but inevitable that he could not last. His distinctiveness and originality set him apart not just from Europe--the American poet should be somehow separate--but from reality itself.

In dealing with Henry James, the Spectator was still in search of something "distinctively" American. In its first review of James, it thought it had found "a peculiarly American flavour."[2] But the reviewer missed James's use of the international theme. By the time James's use of Europe and America was more obvious, the Spectator could not conceal its disappointment and anger. The reviewer found it "humiliating" to see this son of the New World in quest of the old and traditional and paying

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[1] LVII (July 21, 1883), 933-5.

[2] XLVII (July 3, 1875), 860.

his respects to old mansions and ruins and Tory landlords. "He takes delight most in that of which we are properly ashamed...."[1] While the Spectator's review of James's Hawthorne was highly commendatory, it noticed a great deal of annoying condescension in the author's attitude towards America, and suggested that the condescension comes as naturally to James as to Matthew Arnold.[2] Still later came a complaint of James's "blank neutrality of feeling" towards America.[3] It should be observed that the Spectator's lack of enthusiasm for James did not have its origin in the simple fact that he was out of sorts with middle-class liberal-democratic society in the New World. Hutton had praised Henry Adams' Democracy, for example, as a good delineation of the deadness and sterility of democratic social and political life.[4] The Spectator could tolerate criticism of the liberal world and its ideology. But it could not tolerate a rejection of the present for the past; nor could it tolerate James's (or for that matter Arnold's) detachment.

The Spectator's major objection to James was more deeply ideological. Ultimately he could do no more to light the way than could Whitman. The criticism here was again didactic, but it

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[1]LVII (Feb. 2, 1884), 100.

[2]LIII (Jan. 3, 1880), 18-19.

[3]LXI (Aug. 4, 1888), 1066-7.

[4]Reprinted in Contemporary Thought and Thinkers, I, 69-76.

struck far greater depth than the many complaints about sexual morality might at first suggest. The Spectator had often complained about James's pessimism. This was as unacceptable as Whitman's monistic optimism. The best and most revealing attack on James's pessimism is an article, apparently by Hutton himself, entitled "Thin Pessimism."[1] The occasion for the article was a remark that James had made in the Century Magazine about Emerson's "thin optimism." Cleverly and acutely, the Spectator traced out a line of Puritan degeneration in Carlyle, Emerson, and James. Carlyle's Puritan sense of evil and struggle gave him a "fierce pessimism." Emerson threw out the idea of evil but retained a Puritan faith in divinity, divine incursion into the temporal world. James, representing the last phase of degenerate Puritanism, sees evil, as does Carlyle, but has given up struggling against it. For James, man is helpless and cannot be redeemed by God; there is no divine intervention in the world of natural evil. James as artist, therefore, can only recreate with detachment a meaningless world.

There is, the Spectator affirms in a later review,[2] more of a plan to the world than Henry James thinks. Princess Casamassima is "the novel of a man who thinks the world is aimless, and loves to exaggerate that aimlessness in his own descriptions of it."

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[1] LVI (June 2, 1883), 702-3.

[2] LXXIX (Oct. 30, 1897), 603

It is basically a false metaphysics that drives James to his arridity, his elaborate but detached psychological probing, his impulse to create a world in which helplessness is universal.

By the time the Spectator had passed into other hands, the century was near its end. The Spectator, too, showed a change. Perhaps it was a violent reflex to the fin de siecle mood. In those topsy-turvy days at the turn of the present century, Robert Buchanan lost his faith in the great dream of a perfect society, and the Westminster somberly set St. Augustine to work on Whitman's philosophy of evil, and the liberalized Quarterly paid its respects to Tory-inclined Henry James. And the Spectator? It abandoned its philosophizing and became a hard-fisted if weaker-headed mouthpiece of middle class standards. In 1897 it dismissed James as "a beautifully dressed child making an elaborate mud-pie in the gutter." Four years later, after attacking the morality of The Sacred Fount, it complained that James's characters are never "in business," are "detached from the arena of action or struggle for life," and are never touched by political and economic questions.

> But Mr. Henry James, with imperturbable aloofness, continues, with unimpaired industry and unflagging interest, to apply his microscope to the sophisticated emotions of corrupt and luxurious idlers.[1]

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[1] LXXXVI (March 2, 1901), 318-19.

The Westminster Review slowly shifted its course during the century and dropped a few comments on American literature along the way. It began in 1824 as the official organ of the Benthamite radicals; its critics seemed to work in terms of a middle class Benthamite utopia, and tried to define the place of literature within it. Typical of its early period is John Stuart Mill's well-known review[1] of Coleridge's Works (1829), which sets forth the rather startling notion that Coleridge is a great poet because he desires to promote the happiness of the world, because his conclusions are logical, and because he treats human character psychologically. But by 1840 James Mill's influence was gone, and in 1851 the magazine was rejuvenated by John Chapman. It became less doctrinaire, and more broadly liberal. Also, paradoxically, it became less literary.[2]

The Westminster began its career with a devastating attack by James Mill on the Whiggery of the Edinburgh. Even after it shed much of its utilitarianism, its editorial position was distinctly more radical than that of its Whig rival. And yet the estimates it made of the literature coming out of the new, free, middle class world of America are not remarkably different from the Edinburgh's estimates. They are only fuller and more complete.

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[1] Westminster Review, XII (Jan., 1830), 1-31.

[2] Cf. Walter Graham, English Literary Periodicals, 251-255.

The best of them--one of the best in Victorian criticism--appeared in 1870.[1] The article took thirty well-spent pages to elaborate these points: that until recently an "innate hostility" had suppressed even the attempt at an American literature; that the emergence of a class having wealth and leisure has made the attempt at writing literature a reality; that the first fruits were imitative and lacked "nationality," and some later fruits show the blemishes of excessive haste and bold experiment; that America's literary effort is as yet unsuccessful; that its success cannot be guaranteed, for there is "no uniform law of progress in poetry."

Surely this is not the kind of liberalism that had stirred American readers of the Democratic Review. Lurking behind it is again that old Victorian mainstay, the idea of class. The Westminster could muster some excitement about the American democratic masses, but even this was with a reservation: "They support literature, if they cannot create it."[2] But the commercial, thrifty, money-making character of the American middle class stunts poetic genius and leaves "little hope or scope for poetry."[3] The reviewer recognized the awkwardness of attacking democratic literature and mass culture in a review devoted to the cause of liberal democracy, and he was eager to explain himself:

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[1] XXXVIII (new series) (Oct., 1870), 263-294.

[2] Ibid., 267. [3] Ibid., p. 280.

> Ardent democrats we may be, yet it occurs to us that the creating of all men equal politically and socially did not imply also an equality in intellect and genius. All men may vote by ballot; but all men cannot write poetry.[1]

The Westminster was not of Whitman's mind; its democratic convictions did not carry it to the idea of the "divine average." "Poets," warned the Westminster, "should never write for the public.... Their gift is a pearl of too great a price to need the gaze and admiration of the vulgar to enhance it."[2]

Still, the Westminster was closer to Whitman's orientation than to James's. In Whitman there was at least some kind of hope for modern literature; he was the poet who could lead the world to a "higher goal," away from the "puny, neurotic, peddling poetasters" of the day.[3] James was apparently included in this sickly group from whom Whitman could save us: in the forty years in which he flourished as a novelist, the Westminster gave him only one paragraph--a paragraph of faint, undeveloped praise for The American.[4]

Notice that Whitman only could save the day. So far as the Westminster was concerned, he did not succeed at all. It's only significant piece on Whitman appeared in the last year of the

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[1] XXXVIII (new series) (Oct., 1870), 279-280.

[2] Ibid., 282.

[3] CLII (Nov., 1899), 555.

[4] LVII (Jan., 1880), 285.

century.[1] Fin de siecle disillusionment had become the last phase of a periodical--now a monthly--which had begun as a radical-utopian quarterly. Early in the article, the tone is appropriately wistful. "If only America were all that he sings, how worthy it would be of our imitation!"[2] Whitman's vision is seductively attractive;

> Yet these great hopes and visions carry Whitman into strange heights of optimism, where it is not easy for those on whom the realities of life press to follow him. Rightly he holds out a hand to the scum of the earth.... But it is one thing to help such creatures; it is another thing to say that their evil has no real difference from other people's good. When Augustine tells us that evil is always rising up into good...we can understand [him].... But we cannot therefore welcome evil as though it were only good in a mask.[3]

Whitman's greatest defect is, in short, "a ridiculous lack of discreet Manicheism."[4]

The whole article makes surprisingly good reading as a preface to the thought which was to come out of the T. E. Hulme circle a dozen years later. Romantic optimism was dying, at least in some places--and middle class liberal optimism was dying--in, of all places, the Westminster Review. The Adamic myth was breaking up; a dying liberal review was quoting Augustine on evil. What Hulme and Eliot felt in 1913 (the year the Westminster died) about man and western post-Renaissance thought

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[1] "Walt Whitman: The Poet of Brotherhood." CLII (Nov., 1899), 548-564.

[2] Ibid., 550. [3] Ibid., 557. [4] Ibid., 553.

may not have been startlingly original, without immediate antecedents.

There is a difference, though, between Hulme's harsh preachments of Original Sin and the Westminster's last comment on Whitman. The Westminster's reviewer could not quite succeed in loosening his grasp of Whitman's hopeful dream. He ended the article as he began it, in a mood of wistfulness. When all else is said, Whitman is still the great prophet of Brotherhood, of a society in which social divisions do not exist, of "the City of Gold."[1]

Before passing on we should notice two other liberal periodicals which took notice of Whitman: Leigh Hunt's Examiner and Chambers' Journal. Both of them were politically radical. But Whitman's social and literary radicalism was for them, as it was for the Whig Edinburgh and the radical-to-moderate Westminster, too big a step. The Examiner,[2] reviewing the first edition of Leaves of Grass (1856), imagined Whitman as a "wild Tupper of the West" who had been brought up to the business of an auctioneer but was banished to the back woods to read Emerson and Carlyle. The reading, conjectured the Examiner, drove him mad; he wrote only "when the fits came on." Whitman was only obscene and foul-mouthed; his cataloguing "a kind of lunacy." Chambers', a popular journal written for a low level of literacy, was upset by the

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[1] CLII (Nov., 1899), 562-3.

[2] No. 2512 (Mar. 22, 1856), 180-1.

quality of Whitman's democratic thought.[1] By implication Chambers' was saying over again that "en masse" was not enough, that there had to be social distinctions, perhaps even classes:

> If he did not speak "the word of the modern" quite so often, or, at least, not borrow it from the penny-a-liner, it would be better for his fame.... If a man could gain the suffrages of the human race by flattering them with the sense of their own tremendous importance, this poet would be king of the world.

But this is not merely Whitman as a person; "his very faults are national."

It is safe to conclude that the liberal periodicals, even the radical ones, were not yet ready to abandon their social and intellectual traditions to Whitman's self-assured utopia. They were eager for change; they often hoped to find the model for change in America; but, perhaps because they owed their livings to their readers, they were more timid than William Rossetti and John Addington Symonds and Edward Dowden in joining the exciting westward parade.

III.

Lord Bryce's The American Commonwealth (1888), still highly regarded as a study of American society, reflects a liberal mind somewhat hesitantly embracing the new order. With it Bryce earned his place somewhere near Tocqueville, surely above Lecky, surely equal to Arnold among the social critics of nineteenth

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[1] Chambers' Journal, XLV (July 4, 1868), 420-5.

century America.[1] Like most of the thinkers in his age, he felt the world shifting under his feet. He tried to see and describe and define the Victorian transition, and he tried as a writer, teacher, and statesman to serve as a pilot. He perceived a breakdown in the continuity of culture and saw that the saving grace of traditional religious and social impulses was vanishing. Like Lecky, although to a lesser degree, he could never shake off an uneasy fear for the future. But he remained convinced that hope for the future lay with liberal democracy. Cautiously, he gave himself to what Emerson had called the Party of Hope; the Party of Memory, to which even Emerson's friend Carlyle belonged by virtue of his mediaevalism and his hatred for individualism, seemed to Bryce to be a loose collection of worshippers of beautiful but ineffectual ruins. His break with institutions and the old order, and his affirmation of faith in a new order of freedom, was never vigorous or dramatic. He felt compelled to look steadily at America and to find a hopeful pattern for the future there.

His contemporaries rightly regarded him as the leading English authority on the United States. He certainly came the closest to reaching the stature of Tocqueville, though the American historian Nevins is probably over-enthusiastic when he writes that "Bryce and De Tocqueville stand alone, and Bryce both

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[1] Cf., for example, William Clarke, Walt Whitman (London, 1892), 38.

amplifies and corrects Tocqueville."

For in fact Bryce and Tocqueville wrote from different perspectives, perspectives which are closer to being antithetical than to being complementary. In a sense--an important sense--they illustrate the essential difference in method between French rationalism and English empiricism. Bryce respected Tocqueville's book as a rare classic; but he objected, in the name of empirical, scientific method, to Tocqueville's method of deducting, in the manner of Plato, from an a priori ideal of democracy. Such writers, said Bryce, "have preferred abstract speculations to the humbler task of ascertaining and weighing the facts."[1] Tocqueville is too often "merely fanciful."[2]

Bryce gave this difference in method special emphasis in dealing with American culture and literature. He held Tocqueville largely responsible for the notion that democracy hinders and stunts the arts and the intellect. There is, as Bryce notes, an opposite theory, which points to the superiority of Athens over Sparta and of republican Rome over despotic Rome. But Bryce could have explained, what we must explain, that Tocqueville was working with a particular definition of democracy which would make impossible such a comparison. Bryce dismissed the whole idea of the inferiority of democratic culture as outlined by Tocqueville

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[1]James Bryce, The American Commonwealth (London: Macmillan, 1888), vol. II, p. 759.

[2]Ibid., p. 758.

because

> It is really an a priori doctrine, drawn from imagining what the consequences of a complete equality of material conditions and political powers ought to be.[1]

There is another basic difference between them. Tocqueville, while making no claims to scientific partiality, achieved a fine scholarly detachment which still preserves his book. Bryce, consciously striving for scientific impartiality, unconsciously brought himself into the paradox which crippled many Victorian historians. The paradox is simply this: the very force in the nineteenth century mind which demanded that the world be viewed with scientific objectivity also carried with it, in its hip pocket, so to speak, a general teleological belief in progress. Bryce, like so many of his contemporaries, was certain that he held no dogmas; so he set out in pursuit of truth with what Nevins innocently calls "unreasoning optimism."

It is as an empirical observer and as an optimist, then, that Bryce examined American culture. He found that most of the problems raised by Tocqueville had "silently melted into the blue."[2] That knotty matter of the tyranny of the majority, "which enslaves not only the legislatures, but individual thought and speech, checking literary progress, and preventing the emergence

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[1] Bryce, II, 758.

[2] Sir James Bryce, Studies in History and Jurisprudence (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), I, p. 427.

of great men," is "not a serious evil in the America of today."[1] "Faint are the traces which remain of that intolerance of heterodoxy...whereon (Tocqueville) dilates."[2]

Notice how Bryce's empirical observations conflict with the observations of others who were looking at the America of the 1880's. Twain, too, was an "empirical observer"--though he was progressively losing some of his "unreasoning optimism." Bryce's picture leaves out the Robber Barons, the crassness of the Gilded Age, the fear and cruelty that tied together small-town mobs as Huck Finn saw them. Even Whitman, looking at the reality instead of the dream for a moment while writing Democratic Vistas, worked his way inductively into a world surprisingly like the one prophesied in Democracy in America. Bryce did not see either what his radical countryman Robert Buchanan (almost alone among nineteenth century mortals) saw: the huge genius of Melville ignored and reduced to forty years of tragic silence.[3] To notice this disparity of vision may be a digression, but it has a point: empirical observation of an entire culture is a difficult thing, complicated by prejudgments of what one hopes to find (in Bryce's case) and by the shock of temporary or permanent disillusionment (in the cases of Twain, Whitman, and Buchanan).

Bryce was by no means blind to the inadequacies of American

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[1]Bryce, Studies, I, 422. [2]Ibid., I, 423.

[3]See below, p. 267.

culture. "American democracy has certainly produced no age of Pericles."[1] Her literature he found to be mediocre, showing no "distinctive quality."[2] (Like most critics of American imitativeness, he passed over Whitman without comment.) But Bryce thought that the deficiencies of American culture, especially since Tocqueville's deductive method of analysis, had been exaggerated.

> Neither has [American democracy] dwarfed literature and led a wretched people, so dull as not even to realize their dullness, into a barren plain of featureless mediocrity.[3]

American culture was deficient; but the source of the deficiency was not democratic thought or the democratic social order.

> To ascribe the deficiencies, such as they are, of art and culture in America, solely or even mainly to her form of government, is not less absurd than to ascribe, as many Americans of what I may call the trumpeting school do, her marvellous material progress to the same cause. It is not Democracy that has paid off a gigantic debt and raised Chicago out of a swamp. Neither is it Democracy that has denied her philosophers like Burke and poets like Wordsworth.[4]

He traced the want of culture instead to perfectly natural causes[5] --most of which had already been examined by Tocqueville. The shortcomings[6] that are present in American literature, Bryce

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[1] American Commonwealth, II, 759.

[2] Ibid., II, 764. [3] Ibid., II, 759. [4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., II, 767-777. Cf. Nevins, op. cit., pp. 436-437.

[6] Bryce's list of shortcomings is also very like Tocqueville's list of predicted shortcomings. Cf. pp. 55-59 above. Bryce found a general lack of taste, a liking for bold effects, a demand

insisted, had little or no relationship to the democratic form of American society, and little relationship to the general problem of cultural orientation.

He stated fairly the case that other analysts have against democratic culture and its effects upon literature; he was even willing to put the case that writers would have to eschew refinement for the sake of communication:

> Now the judgment of the masses is a poor standard for the thinker or artist to set before him. It may narrow his view and debase his style. He fears to tread in new pathe or express unpopular opinions; or if he despises the multitude he may take refuge in an acrid cynicism.[1]

But Bryce stated this only in order to refute it. His refutation, manifesting far more of liberal optimism than of empirical observation, implied (what he stated directly elsewhere)[2] that the wisdom of the mass is always greater than the wisdom of the select few:

> But it is quite possible to have a democratic people which shall be neither fond of letters nor disposed to trust its own judgment and taste in judging them .... No man need lean on a faction or propitiate a coterie. A pure clear voice with an unwonted message may at first fail to make itself heard over the din of competitors for popular favour; but once heard, it

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for quick effects, a tendency towards intellectual novelty for its own sake, and a tendency to equate bigness and greatness. Cf. Ibid.

[1] American Commonwealth, II, 762-3.

[2] Nevins, op. cit., p. 434.

> and its message will probably be judged on their own merits.[1]

The rejection of a coterie and the confidence that "a pure clear voice" will make itself heard in a democratic society--is it not finally the essence of Whitman's dream about a new literature?

Unlike Whitman, Bryce still thought in terms of classes. Social equality would not tear down the class structure; it would only soften and humanize it. With an unconscious lack of parallelism which is almost definitive of liberalism, Bryce put it this way: "I do not think that the upper class loses in grace; I am sure that the humble class gains in independence."[2] But the independence of the humble does not threaten culture.

In fact, he thought the prospects for rapid improvement in American culture and literature were good. The energy being spent on material conquest would soon be diverted to the arts.[3] Greater wealth would also aid the cause; many of the phenomena which Tocqueville had ascribed to democracy "were due only to the fact that large fortunes had not yet grown up in America...."[4] A variety of social factors would combine to improve things; but social equality neither stunted the artist's growth nor drove him into isolation.

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[1] American Commonwealth, II, 763.

[2] Quoted by Nevins, op. cit., p. 435.

[3] American Commonwealth, II, 767-777.

[4] Studies in History and Jurisprudence, I, 391.

In short, Bryce predicted a socially viable democratic movement in literature and ruled out the necessity and even the approach of a cultured school--just at the time that these two were beginning to grapple. His total feeling for a new, free world oriented westward was one of measured confidence.

IV.

Robert Buchanan, Swinburne's fiery enemy, was a life-long devotee of Whitman and his work. His admiration, indeed, often led him astray and deprived him of a badly needed sense of discrimination.[1] He was the radical son of a radical Owenite pamphleteer,[2] "loyal throughout life to the anti-religious tradition in which he was bred."[3] He was a busy journalist, and the author of a curious collection of verse significantly entitled Buchanan's Poems for the People.

Buchanan's account of his first introduction to Whitman's poetry typifies the rebel spirit that always moved within him:

> When the critics tell me that the style of a book is bad, I am always tempted to buy that book. For this reason in my young days I bought Walt Whitman.[4]

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[1] Cf. Blodgett, Walt Whitman in England, p. 76.

[2] Dictionary of National Biography, III, 195.

[3] Ibid., Second Supplement, I, 247.

[4] Harriet Jay, The Life of Robert Buchanan (London, 1903), 271.

He liked the style; he liked everything about Whitman. By 1868 he had published his first essay on him. For thirty years more he defended and championed him. He compared him to Socrates and to Christ, and in a lengthy poem[1] written after his return from America in 1885 he castigated the Americans for honoring James and Howells instead of Whitman.

> ...whose spirit, like a flag unfurled,
> Proclaims the freedom of the world.

It is not surprising that Buchanan should have shared completely Whitman's viewpoint on the needs of modern literature. "It is at last clear," he tells us in an essay called "On My Tentatives," "that the poetry of humanity is newly dawning."[2] Elsewhere he speaks of Whitman sowing

> the first seeds of an indigenous literature, by putting in music the spiritual and fleshly yearnings of the cosmical man, and, more particularly, indicating the great elements which distinguish American freedom from the fabrics created by European politicians.[3]

But Whitman's vision is not restricted to America. He is in the vanguard of a great sweeping movement; he "sees everywhere but one wondrous life--the movement of the great masses, seeking incessantly under the sun for guarantees of personal liberty."[4] Buchanan was eager to transplant what Whitman had sown.

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[1] "Socrates in Camden, With a Look Round," Academy, XXVIII (Aug. 15, 1885), 103.

[2] David Gray and Other Essays (London, 1868), p. 297.

[3] Ibid., p. 207. [4] Ibid.

For Buchanan, as for Whitman, this new-breaking poetry of humanity was to confine itself to the actual physical objects of the here-and-now. The new literature, like Whitman's America, will have none of

> that worst absenteeism wherein the soul deserts its proper and ample physical sphere, and sallies out into the regions of the impossible and unknown.[1]

Like Whitman, he insisted that "actual life, independent of accessories, is the true material for poetic art...."[2] He advocated a manly, rugged, athletic literature. He assailed bitterly the literati in America with their "mania for false refinement";[3] James and Howells were the leaders of a group of "divers deft man-milliners and drapers, busy in the manufacture of European underclothing."[4] Complaining about Whitman's neglect, he again flailed James as the antithesis of the new literature:

> Tell James to burn his continental
> Library of the Detrimental,
> And climb a hill, or take a header
> Into the briny billowy seas,
> Or find some strapping Muse and wed her,
> Instead of simpering at teas!
> How should the Titaness of nations,
> Whose flag o'er half a world unfurls,
> Sit listening to the sibillations
> Of shopmen twittering to girls?[5]

The new literature would be a mass literature, dealing with

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[1] David Gray and Other Essays, p. 209.

[2] Ibid., 290. [3] Ibid., 293.

[4] Quoted in Jay, Robert Buchanan, 298.

[5] "Socrates in Camden," 103.

the common and the ordinary, making its appeal to and submitting to the judgment of the masses. For him this created no problem. He took rakish pride in the fact that his own "greatest opponents have been found among men of what is called 'literary culture.'" With jaunty modesty he suggested that

> the success of my writings with simple people may be no sign of their possessing durable poetic worth, but it at least implies that I have been labouring in the right direction.[1]

He did not pause long enough to reflect on the fact that it was in such a mass society that Whitman was usually either vilified or ignored and "No one seemed to know anything" of Melville, who

> Sits all forgotten or ignored
> While haberdashers are adored![2]

Buchanan was not totally blind to particular faults in Whitman. It is strange--and unfortunate--that he did not try to account for the fact that his beloved master was "not an artist at all, not a poet, properly so called";[3] that he was a "prophet with no taste" who lacked sweetness and music and who employed "crude metaphors and false notes" and "needless bestialities" while demonstrating "a general want of balance."[4] His confidence in Whitman's genre, however, never wavered:

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[1] "Socrates in Camden," p. 291.

[2] Ibid., p. 103.

[3] David Gray, p. 215.

[4] Ibid., p. 218.

> ...[W]hen this has been said, all blame has been said .... Walt Whitman has arisen on [sic] the States to point the way to new literatures. He is the plain pioneer, pickaxe on shoulder, working and "roughing." The daintier gentlemen will follow, and build where he is delving.[1]

Henry James was one of those "daintier gentlemen"--one who earned Buchanan's particular scorn because he had been born with all the potentials that only an American writer had, but had sacrificed his advantage in a vain and foolish desire to become "the superfine young man." In a bombastic article called "The Modern Young Man as Critic" (1889),[2] Buchanan went after James as a writer who lacked manly vigor, flesh and blood, and intellectual and moral health. Buchanan was appalled by James's "pessimism" and by his cynical anti-sentimentalism--products of a man who "has never dreamed a dream or been a child."[3] It is culture that has ruined James, Howells, and such writers:

> The air of free literature asphyxiates and paralyses them. Outside of society and Paris, they are far too clever, far too educated, to breathe or live at all.[4]

To Buchanan's mind James had exiled himself clean out of modern literature. He would have no place in it.

> I can quite imagine that Mr. Henry James, had he read less, travelled less, known less, might have become a highly interesting writer; but early in his career he appears to have quitted America for Europe, and to have left the possibilities of his grand nativity

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[1] David Gray, p. 219.

[2] Universal Review, III (March, 1889), 353-361.

[3] Ibid., 355. [4] Ibid., 358.

> behind him. To be born an American is surely a great privilege; yet nearly all Americans of talent flit moth-like towards the garish lights of London or Paris, and hover round these lights in wanton, not to say imbecile, gyrations, till they pop into the glare, drop down singed and wingless, and are forgotten.[1]

The extent of Buchanan's American orientation is almost amusingly apparent. His description of Henry James is almost exactly Whitman's description of Matthew Arnold, or the common American's stereotyped description of the English man of culture:

> Highly finished, perfectly machined, icily regular, thoroughly representative, Mr. James is the educated young or youngish American whom we have all met in society; the well-dressed person who knows everybody, who has read everything, who has been everywhere....[2]

But even the eager optimism, the exuberant radicalism, and the impatient, slashing ridicule of Buchanan fizzled out at the end of the century. His last piece of writing was significantly entitled "The End of the Century." It is a wistful regret, a slowly gathering awareness that something in the century went wrong. Buchanan sounds very much like a slightly confused old man who has just awakened from a splendid dream and would like to go to sleep again. The actual weighs heavily on him:

> Democracy and Humanitarianism are almost as discredited as Christianity, the Dream of perfection is over .... Among all the great Prophets of the dying Century, only one remains to us--Herbert Spencer....[3]

Buchanan's last mood is very like that of the Westminster's final

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[1] Universal Review, III, Ibid. [2] Ibid., p. 355.

[3] Harriet Jay, op. cit., p. 305.

review of Whitman: he cannot quite bring himself to believe that the dream is over. He too ends on a misty, almost other-worldly note of faint but unkilled hope:

> ...when the hope of Democracy is realized, the prophecy of philosophy will be fulfilled, and finally we shall discover that the World is Fairyland after all.[1]

V.

Scotland, with its memories of the Highland clearances, its intimacy with French thought through the "Auld Alliance," its long tradition of popular romanticism culminating in Burns, and its strong nationalist and Presbyterian antipathy to the English Establishment, was fertile soil for the liberal movement. The Scots were naturally disposed to take a keen interest in what was taking shape in America. While sprawling America virtually ignored Walt Whitman, tiny Scotland produced a number of articles and three books on him in his own lifetime.

One of them is worth only passing notice. Written by one James Wilkie and published by the Fifeshire Journal in 1886, it bore the title The Democratic Movement in Literature: Walt Whitman. Wilkie, too, found in Whitman a hint of what modern literature was to be: expansive, realistic, unrestrained, like "the free wild air of the prairies."[2] An enthusiastic democrat, he saw the

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[1]Harriet Jay, op. cit., p. 298.

[2]The Democratic Movement in Literature: Walt Whitman (Cupar, Fife, 1886), pp. 39-40.

past as a mere encumbrance. Europe's place was in the past, America's in the future. He attacked the American "traditionalists" as forcefully as he praised Whitman. Longfellow and Bryant were out of stride with the times; they were traitors to the spirit of their country and their age.

> There is nothing democratic in Longfellow. He is the fitting companion to a romantic English maiden in the deep window seat of some old hall, where the lazy afternoon sunshine lies languidly upon the age-stained fountains....[1]

The old hall and the age-stained fountains were, of course, just the things that Irving, Cooper, Hawthorne, Longfellow, and Henry James were reaching out for while Whitman "roared in the pines."

William Clarke, another energetic radical, who was the English editor of Mazzini's essays, also studied Whitman at book-length. The book is a thorough and careful defense of Whitman; although it is overshadowed by John Addington Symonds' book, it is still of considerable interest as a nineteenth century British apology for Whitman.

Again in Clarke's case, it is the awareness of transition, of the passing of the world as men knew it, that compels an interest in Whitman. "Our acceptance of Whitman," he wrote,[2]

> mainly depends on whether we accept the advent, welcome or unwelcome, of a new world; on whether we really believe that the old forms are exhausted; on whether we can say with him--

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[1] The Democratic Movement in Literature, p. 23.

[2] William Clarke, Walt Whitman (London, 1893), p. 76.

'Away with old romance! ...
Away with love-verses sugared in rhyme, the intrigues,
amours of idlers.'

and can also

'Raise a voice for superb themes...
to Exalt the present and the real,
To teach the average man the glory of his daily
walk and trade.'

Clarke generally welcomed the advent of such a world and such a literature. Whitman's poetry was "the first rough draft of a great American literature."[1] It would soon enough spread to Europe. He honored Whitman for parting company with "mere eloquent versifiers, far-off echoes of [Europe], or conventional authors who accepted without questioning all the respectable dogmas in morals, religion, and society."[2] Whitman's greatness, he contended, rises directly out of his isolation from Europe.

> [H]ad he been brought up on European culture, he could only at best have added to the kind of work which Longfellow and Irving did so well. In that case he could not have been the voice of this great, rough, virile America, with its 'powerful uneducated persons,' of whom the cultivated Bostonian authors knew no more than they did of the working classes of Europe.[3]

In defending Whitman, Clarke had no intention of overlooking the defects in his poetry. He quite possibly had Edward Carpenter in mind, and perhaps even Buchanan, when he wrote that "those are very doubtful guardians of Whitman's reputation who do not admit

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[1]Clarke, Walt Whitman, p. 52.

[2]Ibid., p. 81. [3]Ibid., p. 52.

Whitman's serious defects."[1] He found "lack of harmony and discernment," "much that is wooden, flat, prolix in Whitman's writings...." But the duty of the critic, he felt, was to "find compensation" for these defects.

> And we may tolerate much from the uncultured bard of the 'divine infant' which we could not put up with from the poet of a rich, full-orbed era or from 'the idle singer of an empty day.'[2]

So far the defense is merely relative. It might be interpreted as saying, "How could you expect to find anything better from an American?" But Clarke's defense is more positive than that. Perhaps, he suggests, the standards of critical judgment must be altered; perhaps they are not applicable to the democratic literature of the newly-awakening world.

> It might even be contended that his formlessness holds the germs of new forms; that the old rhymes will rather be used in the future for mere <u>vers de societe</u> than for great poetry.

We may find the old forms inadequate to contain the liberated spirit.

> It may also be argued that the vast, sweeping conceptions of our age, the suggestions of an infinite surging movement...can never be confined in the narrower and more precise forms of the poetic art, and that Whitman's work affords, in some degree, a hint of things to come.[3]

Clarke did feel some hesitation, some failing of his faith in the new order that was taking shape. He saw a real problem in

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[1] Clarke, <u>Walt Whitman</u>, p. 53.

[2] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 52. [3] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 74.

America's lack of tradition and in her materialism. His glimpse of the world's future is an interestingly accurate picture of the world today, painfully torn between East and West:

> Russia and America--diverse enough in many ways, but alike in their vast territorial expansion and assimilative capacity--seem destined to be the great political organisms, the world powers of the future. This is Nature's decree, which cannot be set aside by any judgment from another court.... Spiritually and artistically supreme, Europe will politically and commercially recede before the resounding tread of Western and Eastern giants. But is this titanic organism to be informed with no soul?[1]

"That," said Clarke, "is the American problem." But dying Europe cannot solve it for her (as Arnold and James, for example, were maintaining). She had to go it alone, looking to the future and cutting herself off from Europe and the past. But would the American Titan find a soul? Clarke thought so. This is the great problem "which Whitman has set himself to solve; he wants to help America to find her soul."[2] The book makes one thing clear: Clarke was confident that Whitman was succeeding.

John Mackinnon Robertson, who had for a few years assisted with the editing of the Westminster Review, refused to accept the idea that the poetic forms of the past were outworn and of no use to the literature of the modern world.[3] Even so, his book is a laudatory defense of Whitman's "movement of expansion." "Perhaps,"

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[1]Clarke, Walt Whitman, p. 46. [2]Ibid.

[3]John M. Robertson, Walt Whitman: Poet and Democrat (Edinburgh, 1884), p. 49.

wrote Robertson, "a more important question than the form of the poetry of the future is that as to the poets' themes...."[1] And while much of the poetry of the age will "go the way of last generation's theology," Whitman will endure. The reason is

> not merely that his message is the intense expression of his deepest passion, but that the passion is the very flower of the life of the race thus far, and carries in it the seeds of things to come. He cannot soon be left behind--he has gone so far before.[2]

In Robertson's book too, Whitman is justified by what amounts to a change in belief. Whitman's poetry reflects for Robertson a gigantic stride of the human soul into virgin realms of thought and existence. The rest of the world must simply adjust and follow. The struggle is one of optimism <u>versus</u> pessimism; we must cast our lot with optimism. It had to be an act of faith, of affirmation. Much of the structure of traditional belief had to be shed along the way--in the name of the great goddess of the nineteenth century, Progress. The idea of sin, for example, must be left behind; its denial is a necessary part of the ritual on the road to freedom and perfection.[3]

Robertson's faith in the New Paradise which was struggling to be born was strong enough so that he would allow Whitman his inconsistencies. The end would justify Whitman's means. He noticed, for example, Whitman's inconsistency in being intolerant,

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[1] Robertson, <u>Walt Whitman</u>, pp. 49-50.

[2] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 52. [3] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 25.

in the name of democracy, of the _litterateurs_, but added that "the prophet of democracy, being what he is, must needs be didactically inconsistent in order to be consistently prophetic."[1]

We might speculate about the strength of Robertson's "faith." For him it was not merely the assent to an idealistic dream. In fact, he did not see the "Dream" tradition in Whitman at all. For him Whitman was not a visionary; the world he represented was, in America at least, here and now. Robertson regarded him as "the most expert scholar of democracy" just as he is "the most actual democrat." Perhaps this literal reading of Whitman made Robertson's faith possible; for he believed that it was as a careful scholar that Whitman had won his "matchless certitude of belief." The dream from which Robert Buchanan awoke at the end of the century was for Robertson no mere dream at all.[2]

VI.

There exist a number of comments on Whitman from minor representatives of radical liberalism, and scattered fragments from major representatives, which deserve a few pages of attention.

Edward Carpenter was a minor literary figure with a great deal to say about Whitman. In his _Days with Walt Whitman_ he acknowledged his discipleship; his earlier lengthy poetic work, _Towards Democracy_, is almost entirely imitative, and won him the

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[1] Robertson, _Walt Whitman_, p. 11. [2] _Ibid._, p. 8.

title of "the Walt Whitman of England." Indeed, Tolstoy[1] had rated him above Whitman, and John Addington Symonds,[2] more moderately, called his Towards Democracy "not only the best interpretation of Whitman's spirit, but also the best imitation of his manner." Whitman himself was delighted to have an imitator, and predicted--erroneously--a great reputation for him.

> I think he has given his book a Whitmanesque odor. He is ardently my friend--ardently. He will yet cut a figure in his own country. He is now just about climbing the hill: when he gets up to the top people will see and acknowledge him.[3]

For Carpenter, too, Whitman was the prophet of a new era.[4] In him the dream was being realized.

> ...The hour has struck for mankind of liberation, of emancipation, from the mere outer rules and limitations...it is an hour which must needs come; and it opens for humanity on an era of unexampled glory.[5]

The democratic dream-world that Carpenter was looking towards was a world of free, natural, communal anarchy; it was the epitome of human evolution; man had already evolved progressively from simple consciousness of self-consciousness; he was now at the brink of "the mass-consciousness of cosmic consciousness of the coming man."

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[1]Quoted by William Diack, "Edward Carpenter: The Walt Whitman of England," Westminster Review, CLVI (Dec., 1901), 655.

[2]Walt Whitman: A Study (London, 1893), p. 149.

[3]Trauble, I, 104.

[4]Days with Walt Whitman (London, 1906), p. 84.

[5]Ibid., pp. 88-9.

This "evolution into a further order of consciousness" is for Carpenter "the key to the future."[1] He devised an interesting program of reform which was to help mankind along into its final Paradisial state; it called for

> ...the gradual evolution of a non-governmental form of Society, the communalization of land and capital...the extension of the monogamic marriage into some kind of group-alliance, the restoration and full recognition of heroic friendships of Greek and primitive times... friendship with the Animals, open-air habits, fruitarian food, and such degree of Nudity as we can reasonably attain to.[2]

When it came to literature, Carpenter shared with many of his contemporaries the rejuvenated "bardic" idea of the writer. We can well imagine what he would have to say about Arnold and James and their theories about detachment. The task of the poet was to prepare the way and guide the common people into the Promised Land. "Literary people" he regarded as a dying race, incapable of contributing to "the great world." Whitman, said Carpenter, was in the van of

> a new era of literature--a literature appealing to all who deal with life directly, and know what it is, a literature which will be read and lovingly absorbed by the millions as time goes on.[3]

Whitman's poetry was prophetically right for the age. For the new literature had to be uncultured (one of Carpenter's books is

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[1] My Days and Dreams (London, 1916), p. 206.

[2] Ibid., p. 208.

[3] Days with Walt Whitman, p. 105.

entitled Civilization: Its Cause and Cure). And as for form: "the form vanishes in the meaning."[1]

Roden Noel, a minor poet under the spell of Shelley who turned his restless energies to socialist slum work, to philosophical reviews in the Academy, and to editing the works of his close friend Robert Buchanan in addition to serving a brief office as groom of the Privy Chamber,[2] also brushed aside Whitman's clumsiness and harshness and justified him in terms of his meaning. Whitman's "ignorance of phrase mongering," said Noel, put him in the company of the old bards. His defects were more than redeemed by his oneness with virgin soil, his acceptance of all, his pride in and use of his own nation, his optimism, his desire to reveal himself rather than to create forms, his oneness with the meanest of people. But Noel stopped short--far short of Carpenter and a good deal short of Buchanan. Whitman's notion of equality disturbed him. Distinctions between men do exist, Noel argued, and "the aggregate soul" could not have gotten on without the great men, the Heroes. It is to Carlyle that Noel turns in order to correct Whitman. There must be heroes--and reverence for them. All of Noel's radicalism could not stand up to his fear of "the tyranny of a blind and prejudiced and ignorant majority."[3]

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[1] Days with Walt Whitman, p. 108.

[2] DNB, XIV, 437.

[3] Roden Noel, "A Study of Walt Whitman, the Poet of Modern Democracy," Dark Blue, II (Oct. and Nov., 1871), 241-253; 336-349.

Sir Leslie Stephen, an avid anti-middle class liberal who had traveled to the States three times, loved Yankees, and was once almost refused admission to Woolwich Arsenal because he looked like an American,[1] was less radical than Carpenter and Noel and more hesitant to accept Whitman as the prophet of the age. Like many another learned Victorian critic, Stephen saw an alarming parallel between Whitman and Martin Tupper. "Walt Whitman always seemed to me," he wrote, "Emerson diluted with Tupper--twaddle with gleams of something better."[2] The more dedicated radicals seldom had such reservations.

Another of them was Ernest Rhys. He was in the thick of the struggle for a new society and a culture for the masses. "I am sure," he wrote Whitman, "you would be tremendously glad to help us here, in the very camp of the enemy, the stronghold of caste and aristocracy."[3] In the introduction in his 1886 edition of The Poems of Walt Whitman, done for the Canterbury Poets Series,[4] Rhys added his voice to the proclamation that was decreeing that "the poetry of archaic form and sentiment" must go.

> We want now a poetry that shall be masterfully contemporary, of irresistible appeal to the hearts of the people; and this we certainly have not in England today.... What...is Tennyson's distinctive achievement in poetry? We have to answer, The Idylls of the King: and Browning's? The Ring and the Book.

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[1]Frederic W. Maitland, The Life and Letters of Sir Leslie Stephen (London, 1906), pp. 107-128.

[2]Ibid., p. 464.

[3]Quoted by Blodgett, op. cit., pp. 192-3.

[4]London, 1886, p. xxviii.

> It does not need a prophet to see at once that there is no hope of poems like these...ever really reaching the people at all.

"Convention," he wrote, "is the curse of poetry, as it is the curse of everything else."[1] Still, something compelled him to want to justify Whitman's break with convention. He did it, with no apparent discomfort, by appealing to a convention of rebellion:

> .../A/lthough Walt Whitman is an innovator, he follows as naturally in the literary order as did Marlowe, for instance, and after him Shakespeare, in their day; and is as naturally related to his time.[2]

The affinity between Whitman and the English social radicals was a natural one. We could add the name of Havelock Ellis, whose The New Spirit[3] hailed Whitman as a prophet, and also some of the radical poets and critics to be considered in the next chapter, among them Wilde, James Thomson, William Rossetti, and Edward Dowden.

VII.

As might be expected, the radicals dealt with Henry James more with damning silence than with anything else. It was only the more gifted and more versatile of them who deigned to consider him at all. But because such criticism is on a higher, more aesthetic plane, the reactions of Shaw and William Archer, for example, will be dealt with in the final chapter. Although it may imply a cut at his reputation as a man of letters, it is

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[1] London, 1886, p. xxvi. [2] Ibid., p. xxxviii.

[3] London, 1890.

H. G. Wells who must represent the more doctrinaire radical view of James.

Wells had carried on a rather lengthy correspondence with James on the nature of the novel, beginning in 1898. Two more opposite theories can scarcely be imagined. For James, of course, the novel had to be a work of art; by objective selection and ordering it had to re-present in all its delicate vicissitudes the reality of human life. Here is a typical part of Wells's rejoinder:

> Personally I have no use at all for life as it is, except as raw material. It bores me to look at things unless there is also the idea of doing something with them.... The contemplative ecstacy of the saints would be hell to me. In the--I forget how many--books I have written, it is always about life being altered that I write, or about people developing schemes for altering life. And I have never once "presented" life. My apparently most objective books are criticisms and incitements to change.[1]

For Wells fiction worked through science and sociology; it was close to journalism, describing social problems and suggesting remedies. We have only to recall that Kipps and The Golden Bowl were published in the same year to sense the gulf between Wells and James.

Even so, James was startled and hurt when Wells attacked him in Boon. Actually, Wells's attack was only a witty re-statement

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[1]Quoted by Frank Swinnerton, Introduction, Nocturne (New York, 1917), p. x.

of the periodical attacks that James had been bearing since 1879.

James would surely have agreed with Wells that "a literary congress in America must be a festival in honour of sterility."[1] But they meant different things by sterility. Wells felt that America was continually overlooking her own vigorous, westward-oriented writers because she was looking for something of the European air, "doubly starred in Baedeker." America's resources seemed to Wells more than adequate to produce writers: but he added that the writers were quickly strangled by the demands for unnatural literary conformity.[2]

Wells could only regard James as "a magnificent but painful hippopotamus resolved...upon picking up a pea."[3] Literature should be judged by what it accomplished in the world; it had to be a highly practical thing. He had the characters in Boon come round to discussing the question "Ought there, in fact, to be a Henry James?" Boon's answer is obviously Wells's:

> I don't think so.... There's contributory art, of course, and a way of doing things better or worse .... But the way of doing isn't the end. First the end must be judged--and then if you like talk of how it is done.

James, according to Wells, either left out getting there or got to too trivial a thing[4]--a characteristic which Sir Max Beerbohm

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[1] Boon, The Mind of the Race, The Wild Asses of the Devil, and The Last Trump (London, 1915), p. 147.

[2] Boon, p. 144. [3] Ibid., p. 108. [4] Ibid., p. 101.

also noted, and duly parodied in a sketch in his A Christmas Garland called "The Mote in the Middle Distance."[1]

Wells's robust love of the ordinary set him against James's highly select characters, characters who, he pointed out, "never make lusty love, never go to angry war, never shout at an election or perspire at poker...."[2] The selection was really omission; James "picks the straws out of the hair of Life before he paints her. But without the straws she is no longer the mad woman we love."[3] The selection seemed to Wells based upon a superficial and unnecessary dictum, borrowed from the studio, that "a work of art must be judged by its oneness." James "never discovered... that life isn't a studio."[4]

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[1]Reprinted in F. W. Dupee, The Question of Henry James, pp. 58-62.

[2]Boon, p. 106. [3]Ibid., p. 104. [4]Ibid., pp. 102-103.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TRUTH AND BEAUTY: SCHOLARS AND BELLETRISTS

Occasionally separable from the big, noisy body of didactic Victorian criticism is a thin line of criticism which attempts to judge literature on aesthetic grounds. In many ways the attempt is only a reaction--a reaction against the utilitarianism and the strident moralism and the political bellicosity of the Victorian "main stream." In similar refuge from the main stream is another thin line, a line of criticism which attempts to bolster and solidify literary judgment by utilizing the accumulated learning and the techniques (and at times the pretentious professorial respectability) of scholarship. In the former line we must include the Pre-Raphaelites and the Parnassians and, obviously, the men associated with the aesthetic movement of the 'nineties; but we must also include certain poets and novelists who, though they had political opinions as strong as anyone's, judged the literature of the age by artistic standards more than by any other. In the line of scholars we must place those men--primarily university men--who tried to judge the form and content of literature from outside the Victorian arena, who tried (not always successfully) to ward off political and philosophical labels with the charm of academic life, but who still attempted to address the people within the arena by way of the printed word.

We can only distinguish these lines at the expense of strict justice. Many of the men we are now to deal with can be placed in one or another of the camps that have been marked off in the previous three chapters. Even more obviously, Matthew Arnold, a cultural conservative, was a disinterested scholar who employed aesthetic standards; the reviews we have examined did more than grind their political axes; Ford Maddox Ford at one extreme, and Ernest Rhys at the other, probably do not abstract art to its political orientation a great deal more than do, say, Edward Dowden and Robert Louis Stevenson. But what can be done? The age does not yield very willingly to the categories that its students try to impose upon it. The trap of arbitrary distinction can be only narrowly avoided; we can set apart for separate study some men who, by virtue of academic association or creative achievement or aesthetic proclivity, transcend political labels and signify something beyond them.

I.

The first real flurry of interest in Whitman in England occurred among the Pre-Raphaelites. It was characteristic of the brotherhood, particularly of W. M. Rossetti, to be on the lookout for the experimental in literature. Like most Victorians, they were disappointed; American writing was imitative; they were outspokenly hostile, for example, to Longfellow.[1] Still, with

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[1]Louise H. Johnson, America in the Thought of Leading British Men of Letters, 1830-1890 (Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1943), p. 496.

their heightened sense of the craftsmanship of poetry and painting, what could they make of Whitman?

The total response of the P. R. B. to Whitman was mixed. The first of them to discover Leaves of Grass was the minor poet and sculptor, William Bell Scott. He happened upon a copy of the first edition in 1855 and read it with mixed feelings. He felt attracted to the book and fascinated by it, but he also remarked in a letter to W. M. Rossetti, "I hope the author will shut up and write no more."[1] But fortunately for Whitman, Scott thought enough of his strange prize to send it to Rossetti as a Christmas gift the same year.

W. M. Rossetti's reaction to Whitman is well known. He became, almost immediately, the most active of the Whitman enthusiasts in England.[2] His conviction that Whitman was "one of the great sons of the earth, a few steps below Shakespeare on the throne of immortality"[3] never wavered--as did the conviction of another Pre-Raphaelite, Swinburne. It was Rossetti who put together and arranged for the publication of the first English edition of Whitman--a service Whitman never forgot, for Rossetti's name lent obvious prestige to the venture. In the introduction

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[1] Ruskin, Rossetti, and Pre-Raphaelitism Papers, ed. W. M. Rossetti (London, 1899), p. 147.

[2] Gohdes and Baum, Letters of W. M. Rossetti Concerning Whitman..., p. viii.

[3] Ibid., p. 63.

to his edition, and in numerous essays and letters, Rossetti warmly praised and eagerly defended Whitman.

But W. M. Rossetti was not the exact image of the pure Pre-Raphaelite. For him even more than for Swinburne the attraction was not one of form, but of spirit and idea. Unlike other members of the P. R. B., he had little to say about Whitman's art. He was swept along by Whitman's liberal and liberating spirit, and found in it the voice of his own political passions. An ardent democrat who celebrated the death of the "abhorred of Europe, moveless Metternich" in a fierce sonnet which hears "Europe's tocsin" ringing "terrific birth,"[1] he found in Whitman "the sublime of Democracy."[2] He was confident that this "fresh, athletic, and American poetry" was "predestined to be traced up to by generation after generation of believing and ardent... disciples."[3] His own ardor was not modified by reservations.

His more famous poet-painter brother, D. G. Rossetti, had definite reservations about Whitman. While William Michael was busying himself with arrangements for his edition of Whitman and Swinburne was adding his blazing name to Whitman's cause, D. G. Rossetti released his own feelings to Allingham:

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[1]W. M. Rossetti, Democratic Sonnets (London, 1907), II, xxi.

[2]Letters...Concerning Whitman..., p. 40.

[3]W. M. Rossetti, "Prefatory Notice," Poems by Walt Whitman (London, 1910), p. 22.

> How I loathe Wishi-Washi [Rossetti's name for Longfellow's "Hiawatha"] --of course without reading it. I have not been so happy in loathing anything for a long time--except, I think, Leaves of Grass.[1]

Like his brother, D. G. Rossetti was deeply respectful of Whitman the man. But this could not alter his artistic judgment.

> The Leaves are suggestive, like the advertisement columns of a newspaper...but poetry without form is--what shall I say? Proportion seems to me the most inalienable quality of a poem.[2]

Swinburne's gradual metamorphosis from reverent friend to jeering critic we have already noticed, and along with it his metamorphosis from protesting democrat to haughty aristocrat. He and W. M. Rossetti alone of the Pre-Raphaelites seem to have been swayed by the broader social implications of Whitman's orientation. Allingham objected to the "lawlessness and incoherence" of Whitman's verse. To call it poetry, he wrote, "would be a mere abuse of language."[3] H. Buxton Forman, on the other hand, was closer to W. M. Rossetti. He defended Whitman's "primeval outspokenness" and want of form as "part and parcel of the religion he has felt impelled to preach."[4] William Morris took little interest in the furor over Whitman, though he did send him a note

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[1] Letters of D. G. Rossetti to William Allingham, 1854-1870, ed. G. B. Hill (London, 1897), p. 181.

[2] Quoted by A. C. Benson, Life of D. G. Rossetti (London, 1904), p. 173.

[3] Letters...Rossetti to Allingham, p. 182.

[4] H. B. Forman, "Walt Whitman," in Lloyd C. Sanders, ed., Celebrities of the Century (London, 1887), p. 1047.

of respect on his seventieth birthday.[1]

Because Ruskin's theories about art gave impetus to the P. R. B., which was formed with his detached blessing, we should also consider him at this point. There is no mention of Whitman in Ruskin's papers until 1880. This single comment is a letter; Ruskin's attention is on the spirit and thought of the man.

> I have no time to write such a letter as I should like to Mr. Whitman. Will you kindly transmit the value of enclosed cheque to him--with request for five copies? The reason neither he nor Emerson is read in England is, first, that they are deadly true--in the sense of rifles --against all our deadliest sins, and second, that this truth is asserted with a special colour of American egotism, which good English scholars can not--and bad ones will not--endure.[2]

Moving away from the Pre-Raphaelites en route to the aesthetes, we should consider for a moment Sir Edmund Gosse, who was for a time associated with the P. R. B. and was in later life a close friend of Henry James. From his scant attention to James's relationship to America, his too simple notion that James's alienation was greatly increased by the cold reception which America gave The Bostonians,[3] and his rather strange announcement in 1890 that "the realistic novel has had its day,"[4] we can

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[1]Blodgett, p. 137.

[2]William S. Kennedy, Reminiscences of Walt Whitman (Philadelphia, 1896), p. 84.

[3]Sir Edmund Gosse, Aspects and Impressions (London, 1922), pp. 27-8.

[4]Quoted by Grant C. Knight, The Critical Period in American Literature (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1951), p. 26.

only conclude that Gosse lacked awareness of American temper and American needs. Still, his comments on Whitman are interesting.

In his comments we can detect a gradual cooling. Increasingly he distrusted the effects of Whitman's free, westward orientation. In his case, too, the excitement of the American Dream seems to have worn off by the turn of the century. In an 1876 review in the Academy, he argued Whitman's achievement of "the truly beautiful." But at the same time he was slightly disturbed; he pointed to Whitman's failings as a craftsman, and tied these failings to Whitman's sense of obligation to a rootless, democratic culture. Leaves of Grass, said Gosse, was intended to give the reader a section of "the ordinary daily life of a normal man"--

> and therefore properly falls, as every life does, occasionally into shapeless passages of mere commonplace or worse.

Gosse's hesitancy and detachment are clear enough. He predicted that Whitman would last; but he would last in spite of his formal inadequacies and his "theories about verse and democracy and religion." Somehow he had achieved beauty and "widened emotion."[1]

In 1892, in his Questions at Issue, Gosse again turned to Whitman. But now he characterized his poetry as "bastard jargon," "a return to barbarism," and in a chapter entitled "Has America

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[1] Academy, IX (June 24, 1876), 602-603.

Produced a Poet?" Whitman is not even mentioned.[1] Two years later he jabbed at Whitman's poems for presenting "a sort of Plymouth Bretherenism of form, a negation of all the laws and ritual of literature." The feeling of expansiveness and freedom was no longer enough to carry Gosse along. Whitman now seemed to him, not just unpolished, but incomplete, "an expanse of crystallisable substances" who spent his life "in a condition of literary solution...waiting for the structural change that never came."[2] Gosse was echoed somewhat later by Arthur Symons, who suggested that Whitman's "vast poetical nature" remained a nature and never formed an art.[3]

The art-for-art's-sake movement had been simmering in Victorian England since at least the 1860's as a natural consequence to the art-for-use dictum of the middle classes. Swinburne's Poems and Ballads was a kind of turning point, and Pater's prose laid down a critical and philosophical foundation. As the movement approached the nineties it had taken on modifications and definite characteristics. The substance of art, according to the aesthetes, was sensation intensified by passion; they had moved from detachment to the vita contemplativa towards "pure form" and an alliance with music and painting; increasingly they

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[1] London, 1892.

[2] New Review, X (April, 1894), 448-57.

[3] The Cafe Royal and Other Essays (London, n.d.), pp. 22-3.

emphasized the decorative and the arabesque.

"Form," said Oscar Wilde, "is everything. It is the secret of life."[1] "America," Oscar Wilde also said, "is one long expectoration." One American--Whistler, a Henry James in painter's frock with a tinge of the Bohemian--was part of the movement; James himself was on the fringe of it, and contributed some of his pieces to the decadent Yellow Book. We would expect from this, and from the natural antipathy between aestheticism and democratic culture, that Whitman would be badly treated by the aesthetes, if indeed they would notice him at all. But it did not happen this way. Perhaps it was only because daring rebels are birds of a feather, but Wilde, passionate lover of form, who expounded that rhyme is "the one chord we have added to the Greek lyre,"[2] was an admirer of Whitman, enemy of form and sounder of the barbaric yawp. To Wilde, too, Whitman was attractive as "the herald of a new era...a factor in the heroic and spiritual evolution of the human being."[3] The world that Whitman presaged detracted Wilde so completely from his natural orientation that he quite forgot about form: "In his very rejection of art Walt Whitman is an artist."[4] To Wilde it was the prophecy that mattered, not the performance.[5]

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[1]Oscar Wilde, Intentions (London, 1891), p. 201.

[2]Ibid., p. 103.

[3]Oscar Wilde, Reviews (London, 1908), p. 40.

[4]Ibid., p. 397. [5]Ibid., p.40.

Lionel Johnson was also caught in Whitman's spell. Thoroughly educated and severe in taste, so much so that Dixon Scott could observe that "life to a man like Johnson may well have seemed a rather hellish business,"[1] he became the devout worshipper of the raw American poet who celebrated the very grossness of human life. The factor here seems to be a religious and mystical one; it is obvious from his Winchester Letters, written between his sixteenth and eighteenth birthdays, that Johnson's readings in Leaves of Grass had much to do with the awakening of his religious emotions. "Read Whitman!" young Johnson wrote to a friend; "Jesus and Shelley and Whitman, they are steadfast in faith, never wavering."[2] Later, speaking of a friend who did not take to Whitman at all, this intensely serious schoolboy observed,

> Well, he would never be quite happy in my beautiful city of music and light and flowers and incense and Leaves of Grass--that is a visioned Hesperid island, never to be realized.[3]

The very intensity of Lionel Johnson's devotion to Whitman indicates its origin: the need for spiritual orientation, for a faith, in an age of lengthening shadows. Johnson was to fill the need later by his conversion to the Catholic Church. As artist and aesthete, however, Johnson felt mildly uneasy in the company of Whitman--or at least in the company of Whitman's English

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[1] Dixon Scott, Men of Letters (London, 1916), p. 237.

[2] Lionel Johnson, Some Winchester Letters (New York, 1919), p. 204.

[3] Ibid., p. 9.

advocates. In his book on Thomas Hardy, Johnson carefully distinguished himself from the less critical enthusiasts who praised Whitman as a fresh innovator. In honoring innovators like Spenser and Whitman, he argued, we do not honor first of all their innovation (which happens to be necessary for each because of changing times): Spenser is truly great when the spirit of old romance and the new spirit "meet without discord."

> And to consider Mr. Whitman: is he not then most a poet, when, forgetting the imagined new needs of his time and country, he chaunts simple, heroic things, with a 'large utterance,' almost Homeric?[1]

Oddly enough, the aesthetes paid less attention to the delicate skills of Henry James than to the loose and natural flashes of Whitman. We can speculate some reasons for this. For one thing, James wrote prose, not poetry; this might have made a difference. For another, James's reputation as a writer who could be measured by aesthetic standards was already well-established. Finally, though James was in many ways close to the spirit of the movement, his "realism"was a kind of embarrassment to it, carrying a suggestion of compromise.

But there was, of course, no antagonism towards James's artistic detachment or his exclusion of commonplace materials or his preoccupation with the refinement of refinement. These things allied him to the movement. The Yellow Book, in its short, stormy

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[1]Lionel Johnson, The Art of Thomas Hardy (London, 1923), new ed., p. 10.

life, not only published a few of James's stories; it also published two studies of his work. It praised his "elegance of style,"[1] naturally, and his "longing for perfection of form."[2] It elaborated his theme of the conflict between artist and society,[3] and defended him from "mass illiterate judgment"; it commended his deliberately ignoring the cheap tricks and hackneyed melodramatic situations of popular literature and his preference for "subtle emotions" and "bloodless situations."[4] But it went still further and discussed the advantages of his expatriation and his absorption in European culture; it accepted his orientation in memory and tradition and civilization. His writing, commented Lena Milman in her Yellow Book essay,

> is such a perfection of taste, as one would expect an ancient civilization to produce; and lo! an example of it, a very apostle of form, comes to us from over the Atlantic, beyond whose wave the forefathers of his race sought immunity from form....[5]

If we take the aesthetes as a whole, as a school, it is not at all difficult to catch them at a flagrant inconsistency. It is not really possible, without considerable explanation, to accept both Whitman and James, to send up a shout for freedom from form and yet to pay homage to its perfect discipline, to follow the prophet Whitman into a "new era," immune from the past, and

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[1] Yellow Book, II (July, 1894), p. 183. The author is P. G. Hammerton.

[2] Yellow Book, VII (October, 1895), p. 82.

[3] Ibid., p. 81. [4] Ibid., p. 73. [5] Ibid., p. 74.

yet to linger with James in the refinements of "rich, deep dark old Europe." The aesthetes, perhaps largely because they restricted the dimensions of the critic's job, did not see the problem of cultural orientation at all. Their own critical apparatus doomed them to an inconsistency. Once Whitman had lured them--with something other than shape and formal grace--they were too honest to let him go. It was as though the two Rossettis amalgamated into one person--a two-headed one. The neat, decorative frame of aesthetic criticism had been broken.

II.

Closely allied to the aesthetic movement and steeped in classical and mediaeval learning, John Addington Symonds would not appear to be a likely candidate for the school of what Swinburne contemptuously called "Whitmaniacs." He was, the DNB tells us, a "rigid cultivator of poetic form." He devoted eleven painstaking years to his History of the Italian Renaissance (1886). Sickly and consumptive, he poured tremendous energy into his work as a disseminator of the cultural tradition. He had his classics under the tutelage of Jowett; he translated Michelangelo and Campenella; he even translated mediaeval Latin student songs. Before he burned himself out at the age of fifty-three, he asked to be buried in his beloved Rome--under a Latin epitaph composed by his master, Jowett. He was at his best, Richard Garnett tells us in DNB, dealing with slightly decadent art. Had his path never crossed Whitman's, we can scarcely imagine the biting epithets

that Whitman would have had for him. Matthew Arnold, by contrast, was a fairly rugged Kansas town marshall.

But Symonds' path did cross Whitman's. He contributed a few important articles on Whitman to the periodicals, including an answer to Swinburne's "Whitmania" diatribe, and on the day of his death his London publisher put on the market his full-length book, Walt Whitman: A Study.

In reading Symonds we are again reminded of the startling figure Whitman must have cut as the blazing, meteoric prophet of a new world. The Victorian uncertainty and need for a sense of direction is again apparent. On superficial appearance, Symonds had buried himself in the past; actually, he too was looking for some ground to stand on. He thought he found what he was looking for in Whitman. Its substance was democracy and the return to Paradise.

A new literature for a totally new era: Symonds fully agreed. He regarded Whitman's notion of divinity in all things as "the secret of the democratic spirit."[1] And to manifest this imminence of the divine in the common is the primary duty of art "in the immediate future."

> While doing so...art will once more serve the permanent spiritual needs of humanity. This is Democratic Art. The kingdom of the Father has passed; the kingdom of the Son is passing; the kingdom of the Spirit begins.[2]

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[1]J. A. Symonds, Walt Whitman (London, 1893), p. 94.

[2]J. A. Symonds, Essays Speculative and Suggestive (London, 1890), II, 77.

This historical era of the kingdom of the spirit is obviously a natural outgrowth of the romantic revolution; it has been given a further push by "science, the sister of Democracy."

The new society which Symonds saw forming could not possibly feed on the earlier springs of inspiration.[1] Nor could it allow the risk of pollution from these earlier springs: "Three centuries since Shakespeare," Symonds commented, echoing Whitman, "have not sufficed to purge the English mind of Feudal notions."[2]

Symonds' view of this new age, and his optimistic enthusiasm for it, coincided exactly with Whitman's. It was to be an age "delivered from pedantry and blind reactionary fervour--delivered from dependence upon aristocratic and ecclesiastical authority--sharing the emancipation of the intellect by modern science...."[3] Man has finally reached the light; the whole of nature is now seen "for the first time with sane eyes."[4]

The language already makes obvious the fact that Symonds was following, not leading. He was always willing to acknowledge that Whitman was the leader, the prophet of the age. In 1889 he wrote Whitman that he has "long wished to write about [his] views regarding the literature of the future." The world stands indebted to Whitman for what he has done,

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[1] Symonds, Walt Whitman, pp. 119-20.

[2] Symonds, Essays Speculative..., II, 74-76.

[3] Ibid., II, 41. [4] Ibid.

> not only by asserting the necessity of a new literature adequate to the people and pregnant with the modern scientific spirit, but also by projecting and to a large extent realizing that literature in your own work.[1]

Symonds' affinity was so complete that not a single divergence can be found from Whitman's scattered statements on the nature and orientation of modern literature. He insisted that the faculty for seeing beauty in the simplest people and in the commonest things will, in the new age, have to be exercised "in a very different way, and with far other earnestness."[2] He welded the same link between democratic art and "realism"; he believed that "nothing in nature or in man is unpoetical"; he wanted no alternative to Whitman's worship of "spiritualized matter."

Symonds was astute enough to see that something was wrong with the arts in the Victorian age. He was concerned that art should continue to contribute to the intellectual nurture and moral sustenance of society.[3] This concern, coupled with his eager hope for a "new world" and his recognition of a rather grim kind of mechanized and materialistic world lying everywhere about him, brought him squarely against the problem of poet and public. It is best to quote him at length.

> In past epochs...the arts had a certain unconscious and spontaneous rapport with the nations which begat them, and with the central life-force of those nations at the moment of their flourishing.... Art expressed

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[1] Traubel, With Walt Whitman..., IV, 125-6.

[2] Symonds, Essays Speculative..., II, 71.

[3] Ibid., II, 153.

> what the people had of noblest and sincerest, and was appreciated by the people. No abrupt division separated the nation from the poets who gave a voice to the nation.[1]

He went on to show that "the case is altered now," that this rapport has been lost in the rapid upheaval of the nineteenth century. Part of the difficulty is, of course, the creation of a new and multitudinous reading public. The arts have not yet adjusted to this circumstance of social progress. They are still geared to an old world; they still presuppose that the demands have not changed. The poets and artists are

> living for the most part upon the traditions of the past...but taking no direct hold on the masses, of whom they are contentedly ignorant....[2]

After this perceptive analysis, Symonds was ready to frame his question:

> Is Democratic Art possible in these circumstances? Can we hope that [the artists] shall enter once again into vital rapport with the people who compose the nations...?[3]

Symonds answered his question with a loud affirmative. But he gave it a curious twist, born of a burning optimistic faith in the liberated masses. The artist, wrote Symonds, will find it difficult to elevate himself to the new heights demanded of him.

> An arduous task lies before poetry and the arts, if they are to bring themselves into proper relations with the people; not, as is vulgarly supposed, because

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[1] Symonds, Walt Whitman, p. 106.

[2] Ibid., p. 107. [3] Ibid., p. 108.

> the people will debase their standard, but because it will be hard for them to express the real dignity, and to satisfy the keen perceptions and the pure taste of the people.[1]

Notice that so far there is not a trace of disagreement between Whitman and Symonds. Perhaps we should pause at this point and consider how it is possible that this refined and slightly decadent scholar could subject himself so completely to the mystical leadership of an untaught, rugged primitivist who wished to flaunt learning and form and civilization at every turn.

Professor Blodgett, taking his cue from Havelock Ellis' study of Symonds and Whitman in his Sexual Inversion (Philadelphia, 1915), suggests that the whole answer is to be found in Symonds' homosexuality. That Symonds was deeply moved by the "manly love" and "comradeship" theme in the Calamus poems is perfectly obvious; he celebrated the theme in his own poetic tribute to Whitman, "Love and Death: A Symphony." His confessional letters on the subject were an embarrassment to Whitman, who was unwilling to face the full implications of the idea.[2] But surely this is only part of the answer. Even the most ardent passion to reform the world by homosexual comradeship would not commit a man of Symonds' attainments to chuck everything else and follow blindly into political and social and literary theories which are alien to him.

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[1] Symonds, Walt Whitman, p. 103.

[2] For the correspondence between Symonds and Whitman, see, in addition to Ellis, Traubel, op. cit., I, 74, 203, 388.

He would be giving up far more than he would have to give up. Homosexuality is part of the complex--but only part.

Is not the bigger pattern again the response of a man to the dizzying shifts and uncertainties of an age of conscious transition? Symonds, studying the past and writing books and climbing mountains with the same degree of furious energy, always drew himself as one given to morbid introspection.[1] He is a striking portrait of the lost man, the disoriented man, in the nineteenth century. It is even conceivable that the homosexuality to which critics attach so much importance is a symptom rather than a cause--a symptom of spiritual sickness and intellectual aimlessness. A sensitive man in such a condition might grasp at homosexuality, just as Hopkins grasped at divine love and spiritual discipline, Pater at the exotic sensations of the moment, or James Thomson at the bittersweet forgetfulness of alcoholic fog. But a man with Symonds' fine equipment would surely grasp at more than homosexuality, too. Admittedly suffering from a heavy case of Weltschmertz when he first encountered Leaves of Grass, Symonds thought he had found something to hang on to: a total vision of a new and meaningful world that made optimism "not unreasonable." Notice in Symonds' own account of his conversion to Whitman the total sweep of implications and the swiftness of the cure that the new orientation effected:

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[1] DNB.

> ...I was decidedly academical, and in danger of becoming a prig.... My academical prejudices, the literary instincts trained by two decades of Greek and Latin studies, the refinement of culture, and the exclusiveness of aristocratic breeding, revolted against the uncouthness, roughness, irregularity, and coarseness of the poet and his style. But in course of a short time, Whitman delivered my soul of these debilities.... /H/e taught me to comprehend the harmony between the democratic spirit, science, and the larger religion to which the modern world is being led by the conception of human brotherhood, and by the spirituality inherent in any really scientific view of the universe.... He inspired me with faith, and made me feel that optimism was not unreasonable.[1]

Devoted as he was to the new faith that freed him, Symonds could not entirely shake his training. Although he could not bring himself, "rigid cultivator of poetic form" that he was, to complain about Whitman's formlessness, he did balk slightly at Whitman's rejection of the past.

> It may...be doubted whether Whitman is wise in exhorting the miscellaneous population of North America to form a new culture which shall 'displace all that exists.'[2]

The same question disturbed him in his full-length study of Whitman:

> When we reflect what 'the small theatre of the antique, and the aimless sleep-walking of the Middle Ages,' to use Whitman's words, bequeathed to us of spiritual revelations, and compare these with the null or zero of American productivity, we could have preferred a more becoming modesty....[3]

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[1] Walt Whitman, pp. 157-9.

[2] Essays Speculative and Suggestive, p. 37.

[3] Walt Whitman, p. 128.

But Symonds was commenting here on the actual American literature of his time; throughout his writings he impatiently dismissed it, as he impatiently dismissed Whitman's lack of artistic balance, as though it were an annoying irrelevancy. His eye was optimistically on the future--where Whitman's was. The present lapses and deficiencies mattered very little. The new world and the new literature would inevitably come to pass; that hope, that dream was enough.

Edward Dowden's response to Whitman, though not complicated by hints of homosexuality, is remarkably like Symonds'.

Dowden was a respected literary scholar who spent his adult life as Professor of English at Trinity College, Dublin. His criticism was tolerant, broad in scope, and serious; it was characterized by a strong interest in ethical questions. But like Symonds and so many more Victorians, Dowden had his moments with the sickening sensation of being lost without maps. For him, too, the dreams of liberal optimism were a kind of anaesthesia, drugging out despair. In an age of tumbling faiths and dogmas, he needed some expansive optimism. But wherever he found it, he talked about it not as a truth but as a cure. At one moment he could see "Shelley with his eyes fixed upon the golden age to come" as a "representative of the democratic tendencies of art";[1] but by the end of the same essay on democratic art he could only

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[1]Edward Dowden, Studies in Literature (London, 1878), p. 480.

advise his readers that there was no suitable course but "to hope, to conjecture, to believe that this movement is progressive."[1] The Weltschmertz is apparent again; Dowden delights in observing that "nowhere in nature can [Whitman] find announcements of despair."[2] Indeed, Dowden first threw himself into Whitman's arms "because he was hopeful instead of despairing."[3]

Dowden's studies of Whitman are carefully analytical. One gets the feeling from them that the author is fighting with himself, trying to avoid getting carried away. They tend even to be dull--a characteristic which undoubtedly aided Whitman by making him "respectable" in the public eye.

But they are revealing. Dowden went more deeply than most critics into the question of tradition which Whitman's work raised. His defense of Whitman is painstaking and dignified. Like most critics, he began by complaining that the literature of Longfellow, Bryant, Irving, and Emerson is not sufficiently American; that there is, outside of Whitman,

> a hedge around the art and literature of America, enclosing a little paradise of European culture, refinement, and aristocratic delicatesse from the howling wilderness of American democracy.[4]

Scores of other critics had said this before Dowden. Like many of them, he regarded Whitman as the first and only American writer.

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[1] Studies in Literature, p. 518. [2] Ibid., p. 520.

[3] Blodgett, op. cit., p. 43.

[4] Studies in Literature, p. 469.

(He is awkwardly silent about the positions of Hawthorne and Melville relative to this hedge.) But Dowden moved further; he believed a new concept of art and of its relation to society was called for. The advent of democracy, he argued, has changed the entire picture. In a long discussion of the nature of democratic art, he set forth some of the following characteristics and beliefs by which he thought it must be recognized--all of them really re-statements of Whitman:

> Form and style modelled on traditional examples are little valued.... Each new generation...is a law to itself. Except public opinion, there is no authority on earth above the authority of a man's own soul.... [The writer] is permitted to be true to his own instincts, whether they are beautiful instincts or the reverse. The appeal which a work of art makes is to the nation, not to a class....[1]

In a parallel survey of the characteristics of art in an aristocratic society,[2] he showed his disapproval of ignoring, or condescending to, the common and actual; he despised the notion that great virtues are found only in the nobility. The whole structure of this culture must be swept away--to make room for a new culture.

> It must not, however, be supposed that Whitman sets himself against culture. He would, on the contrary, studiously promote culture, but a culture which has another ideal of character than that grown out of feudal aristocracies.... No conception of manhood can be appropriate unless it be of a kind which is suitable...to the uses...of the high average of men.[3]

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[1] Studies in Literature, pp. 481-2.

[2] Ibid., pp. 475-80. [3] Ibid., pp. 509-10.

The "ideal personality" in such a mass culture will be the "typical personality" which is "attainable by every man."[1]

Dowden did not concern himself with the difficulties that literature might encounter in such a society. Like Symonds, he refused to look at the literature of America outside of Whitman for indications of what might happen. The actual mattered less than the dream; the democratic world of which Whitman was the herald was "as yet but half-fashioned."[2] It was "perpetually moving," and man could only hope that the movement was progressive. It seemed to be important for Dowden to feel that the changing world could move hopefully in some direction. If the world got where Dowden hoped it was going, the writers would be clear of any problems with the public; public opinion would function responsibly as the final authority in matters of literary judgment.

But Dowden's caution and hesitancy in handling Whitman may be the protest of the scholar in him against the desperately hopeful dreamer in him. For example, he could not bring himself to call Whitman's writing either poetry or verse.[3] He may well have feared the consequences literature might suffer in exchanging its heritage for an illusory certitude.

Dowden outlived Symonds by twenty years. Might he too not

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[1] Studies in Literature, p. 510.

[2] Ibid., p. 474. [3] Ibid., p. 484.

have felt in the fin de siecle and its aftermath the vanity and the airiness of the hope to which he had clung? We have noticed elsewhere a wistful, melancholic sense of disillusionment among the liberals at the turn of the present century. It is best revealed in the dying or changing liberal periodicals, and it is an important part of the preface to the "new poets" of the twentieth century. It was in this calm and introspective period, in the calm before the ravaging storm of the Great War, that Dowden last referred to Whitman. In a letter written in 1910 he confessed that he would now have approached Whitman with much more reservation.[1]

III.

Much of the scholarly interest in Whitman among Victorians seems to have been stimulated by the respected Dowden, whose long and careful study appeared in the Westminster in 1871. A few other scholarly critics followed, among them Professor George Saintsbury in 1874 and two young friends of Dowden's, Standish O'Grady and Thomas W. Rolleston. Significantly, Victorian professors and scholars had much less to say about James than about Whitman.

Saintsbury, a busy reviewer, dealt with both of them. His reaction to Whitman is an odd reversal of the pattern that unfolds

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[1]Edward Dowden, Letters, ed. E. D. and H. M. Dowden (London, 1914), p. 364.

in most critics of his time. It was quite customary to talk in superlatives about the magnificence of Whitman's cosmic and social vision, and to quietly sweep questions of form and prosody under the rug. But Saintsbury, temperamentally a stable conservative, had far more respect for Whitman's art than for his vision; it was the way the vision was embodied that appealed to him.

He did think that Whitman's view of culture deserved attention. He studied it at some length in a review in the Academy. He was suspicious of Whitman's passion for admitting into art "nothing but what is open to every human being of ordinary faculty and opportunities." Whitman, noted Saintsbury, "cares not that by this limitation he may exclude thoughts and feelings ...infinitely higher and choicer than any which he admits." Saintsbury could not admire Whitman's ideal man, "the divine average," who is "almost entirely uncultured" and is "above all things firmly resolved to admit no superior." To Saintsbury's mind, uncharmed by liberal panaceas, this was careless talk. He concluded the article with a deliberate piece of superb understatement:

> One is inclined...to opine that whatever salvation may await the world may possibly come from quarters other than America.[1]

But Saintsbury's literary judgment rode above his intellect.

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[1] Academy, VI (October 10, 1874), 398-400.

He was not embarrassed to admire Whitman as a man and as a poet. He was one of the original six contributors to the fund which W. M. Rossetti collected for Whitman in 1885.[1] In the same review in which he attacked Whitman's brand of democratic culture, he praised the rhythms of Whitman's poetry--"singularly fresh, light, and vigorous."[2] In his erudite History of English Prosody, published thirty years after the review, he cited Whitman's prosody as "a true marriage of matter and form."[3]

Saintsbury's reflections on Henry James are not very revealing. He did not see the possibility of James's detached European orientation serving as a counter to Whitman's rejection of tradition and civilization. He had his chance in a review of James's Hawthorne. He approved of the book, but his complaint that James pays too little attention to Hawthorne's books and too much attention to the man suggests that Saintsbury failed to see James's theme and purpose.[4] The same kind of myopia confused Saintsbury when he was confronted with James's severe objectivity; he wondered, for example, why James in writing Daisy Miller made no effort to make his American characters attractive.[5] From this

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[1] W. M. Rossetti, Letters Concerning Whitman, p. 155.

[2] Academy, VI (Oct. 10, 1874), 399.

[3] Quoted by Blodgett, p. 187.

[4] Academy, XVII (January 17, 1880), 40-1.

[5] Academy, XV (March 22, 1879), 256.

point on, Saintsbury's objections to James are the stock objections of his contemporaries: over-refined dissection and distillation.[1]

John Nichol, Professor of English at Glasgow University, was the first academic Briton to devote an entire book to American literature. His interest in the subject suggests more a search for meaningful patterns in the century than it suggests idle curiosity in a new "field." He was looking for something as well as at something. As a student at Oxford he had founded the Old Mortality Society, in which he was closely associated with T. H. Green, Swinburne, Dicey, and other kindred "spirits of flame." He was an earnest liberal, pro-Mazzini and pro-Yankee, active in the "liberal cause" at Glasgow. But in his later years his devotion to liberalism began to wane, and he finally drifted into political conservatism.[2]

Some of the ambivalence towards liberal and conservative views can be detected in his American Literature, written when Nichol was in his early fifties.[3] There is a hint of hopefulness in his apologetic explanation that the American people "have had

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[1] Academy, XV (May 10, 1879), 408; XXXVIII (Aug. 23, 1890), 148.

[2] DNB.

[3] The book was published in 1885, when Nichol was fifty-two. It was an expansion of an article which he had written three years earlier for the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

to act their Iliad, and they have not yet had time to sing it."[1] He was attracted by the potentialities that a democratic culture, cut off from Europe, offered to literature. "Foremost among its most attractive features is its freshness, its freedom from restraint...and authority."[2] European literature, in contrast, is constantly threatened by tyranny; European writers "wear their traditions like a chain...and the creative powers are depressed."[3] But Nichol had his reservations, too. He saw the dangers of hack commercialization, and he was sure that such a literature would sacrifice depth to breadth.[4]

Nichol's fears for a free, traditionless literature become manifest in his attitude towards Whitman. Here already, Nichol felt, the freedom had gone to excess. Whitman he regarded as "a writer of great force...ruined as an artist by his contempt for art."[5] Though Nichol apparently wanted the writer to be free from the tyranny of civilization, he could not "acquiesce in [Whitman's] denial of all that civilization has done to raise man above the savage or the chimpanzee."[6] "If Shakespeare, Keats, and Goethe are poets, Whitman is not."[7]

Nichol would have been wise to leave James out of his study. He had no ear at all for the satirical nuances in James. He

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[1] American Literature (Edinburgh, 1885), p. 15.

[2] Ibid., p. 446. [3] Ibid. [4] Ibid., p. 447.

[5] Ibid., p. 210. [6] Ibid., p. 211. [7] Ibid., p. 210.

repeated the common critical witticism that James's craftsmanship was "too good"; we can only wonder if Nichol believed it. He missed completely all trace of satire in The American[1] and complained of Roderick Hudson's "Walt Whitman-like bluster about his art"[2]--apparently not realizing that this speech was meant to speak for Whitman and not for James.

Apparently the academic critics in the Victorian age who did take an interest in American literature were concerned primarily with the Redskin tradition, with the exciting possibilities of a new, democratic literature. For this reason Henry James, who offered no new vision of a distinctly modern literature (so it was thought), was given only passing notice, as in Nichol's book, or was ignored. Arthur Christopher Benson was one of the first academics to deal seriously with James; his criticism falls, in kind as well as in date, into twentieth century criticism. He emphasized James's method of detachment:

> Henry James is never the impassioned advocate, advancing the baser point of view by means of an intellectual sympathy. He has the passionless insight of Shakespeare; he does not skilfully present the case of his puppets; he simply embodies them.[3]

But between Saintsbury and Benson, there is no significant criticism of James from the professors and the scholars.

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[1] American Literature, pp. 389-391. [2] Ibid., p. 393.

[3] A. C. Benson, Memories and Friends (London, 1924), p. 202.

In contrast, a number of them were interested in Whitman. We have already mentioned Powell, George C. Macaulay, Dowden, Saintsbury, and Nichol. R. L. Nettleship, a highly respected professor of philosophy whose work in Greek idealism is still valuable, had a high regard for Whitman's poems; he found in them, according to A. C. Bradley, a sense of vitality which the academic world could not afford, a naked touch of reality.[1] John Todhunter, like Dowden a Dublin professor, cited Hugo, Shelley, and Walt Whitman as the three great poets of democracy.[2]

Dowden seems to have turned the intellectual world of the seething Dublin of the 1870's into a kind of hot-bed of Whitmanism. He and Todhunter were not alone. In the mid-1880's Hopkins was there--he might possibly be the cleric whom Dowden describes to Whitman, the cleric "who halves his truth between Newman and you."[3] And there were also two young friends of Dowden, Standish O'Grady and Thomas W. Rolleston.

O'Grady, along with Rolleston, an important figure in the Celtic Revival, published an article on Whitman in The Gentleman's Magazine in 1875 under the pen-name of Arthur Clive. The article, "Walt Whitman, the Poet of Joy," bristles with hopeful young energy. O'Grady, like Dowden, found in Whitman a tonic for

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[1] R. L. Nettleship, Philosophical Lectures and Remains, ed. A. C. Bradley (London, 1911), pp. 30, 43.

[2] John Todhunter, A Study of Shelley (London, 1880).

[3] Blodgett, p. 122.

uncertainty. The article is a spirited renunciation of nineteenth century melancholy, the strain of which, O'Grady argued, began with Byron and his contemporaries. The world has had too much of it; what is needed is the optimism of Whitman's cosmic vision.

> His eye sees beauty, his ear hears music. All things grow lovely under his hand: deformity, ugliness, and all things miserable and vile disappear.[1]

O'Grady's friend Rolleston was a scholarly, almost pedantic man who spent a good deal of time in Germany. He translated Leaves of Grass into German, corresponded with Whitman, and collaborated with H. B. Cotterill on a pamphlet, Über Wordsworth und Walt Whitman, Zwei Vorträge Gehalten vor dem Literarischen Verein zu Dresden (Dresden, 1884) --a study which attempted to show that Whitman was not a barbaric primitivist but a poet of profound intellect who was closely akin to German idealism. At the time of Whitman's death, Rolleston contributed a eulogistic obituary to the Academy.[2] He praised Whitman, a poet of "peace and hope," as "the greatest American." Again in Rolleston we have a serious scholar who is drawn irresistibly to the hopefulness of Whitman's dream. Whitman's poems, he said, expressed "the whole life of a modern man, living, a democrat, in the midst of a great democratic society." His estimate of Whitman as an artist avoids both rapture and ridicule; it is balanced and just. To defend Whitman's

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[1] Gentleman's Magazine, XV (Dec., 1875), 704-716.

[2] Academy, XLI (April 2, 1892), 325-7.

form, wrote Rolleston,

> is impossible--to attack it looks like a sort of ignoratio elenchi.... Whitman's writings have the form which the creative instinct supplies for itself from within--little or none of that which the decorative instinct imposes from without. I would rather he had both: the greatest art is a union of the two.

But he did find in Whitman's poetry (his shift from pure form to the spirit and content formed is typical) "native power" and "the immense uplifting tide of elemental life." It was the uplifting tide that impressed Rolleston most. With an humility that would have pleased Whitman, he concluded that Whitman's poems were beyond the reach of scholars like himself; they were filled with "things that are nothing and mean everything."

It should be obvious that the Victorian scholars who dealt with American literature saw very clearly its attempt to re-orient both itself and society. For many of them this was attractive enough: they took to Whitman because he offered hope, freshness, a magnificent vision, a way home from the darkling plain of Victorian uncertainty. For John Nichol this was not quite enough; his hope for an alternative, a new orientation, was strong, but he did not have the faith to believe that Whitman had found it. Saintsbury, essentially at home in the European tradition, rejected it completely but accepted the form and cadence that Whitman had found for it. Significantly, in looking to American literature the scholars gave little attention to James. The alternative he represented, essentially Arnoldian, was not recognized as an alternative, one that Americans could nurture more

easily than could Europeans. He did not seem to be offering a "way out," but instead a sterile and arty dissection. He must have seemed, even, insipidly European. He was not what the scholars were looking for.

IV.

No writer leaves us with a more puzzling attitude towards Whitman than does Robert Louis Stevenson. He was at times an intense but vague admirer; his dissention from Whitman was often clouded in comedy and in undertone. And if we try to move on from there to his bigger view of the needs of modern literature, we are left gasping. For here is a young Victorian who can acknowledge Walt Whitman as one of the two major influences upon his life--and who can also claim to have been Henry James's closest friend, one-half of a tender and inspiring literary friendship of which James was the other half, "the sole and single Anglo-Saxon," James had said, capable of seeing how well a James novel was written.[1] The two sides of the American dialogue met in Stevenson as they met in no other Victorian.

He would have a natural affinity with what he called Whitman's "outdoor atmosphere of sentiment."[2] He was attracted to

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[1]Janet Adam Smith, ed., Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of Friendship and Criticism (London, 1948), p. 27.

[2]Stevenson, Familiar Studies of Men and Books (London, 1882), p. 105.

Whitman in part because Whitman believed that the poet "must testify to the livableness of life."[1] This interest in Whitman he shared with Henley, who included four selections from Whitman in his Lyra Heroica: A Book of Verse for Boys.[2] Stevenson, a frail invalid who preached what his friend William Archer called "athletico-aestheticism," wanted to break through the growing gloom of his generation, a gloom that to him was intolerable.

> Young gentlemen with three or four hundred a year of private means look down from a pinnacle of doleful experience on all the grown and hearty men who have dared to say a good word for life since the beginning of the world. There is no prophet but the melancholy Jacques, and the blue devils dance on all our literary wires.[3]

His own sense of joy in assertive living was one antidote; Whitman's exuberance was another.

But there was also in Stevenson something of the natural rebel. Like Whitman, he was a Bohemian;[4] like Whitman, again, he

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[1]Stevenson, Familiar Studies..., p. 103.

[2]Henley's interest in Whitman is to be expected. His "Englandism," says a critic, "approximates Walt Whitman's concept of an American race destined to emerge from the placement of a liberated protestant spirit in an almost infinite geographical vastitude." [J. H. Buckley, William Ernest Henley: A Study in the "Counter-Decadence" of the Nineties (Princeton, 1945), p. 136.] But the interest did not carry him very wide or very deep. There is no mention of Whitman in his writings; and although he gave Whitman six pages in Lyra Heroica, he gave Longfellow twenty pages.

[3]Stevenson, op. cit., p. 102.

[4]"That Stevenson was throughout his life fascinated by the Bohemian ideal is well known: it is not so well known that he

believed that the world was being and had to be newly emancipated. New thought, new moral relationships, a new orientation to the universe--and hence a new literature--had to take shape. The sense of transition from a settled world to a cold and confused one disturbed Stevenson deeply; "science carries us into zones of speculation where there is no habitable city for the mind of man."[1] To drown out the ennui and the maddening fear, Stevenson fused his Bohemianism and his athleticism into a code of loyalty and human dignity in which heroism was still possible--a stoical code of dignified endurance surprisingly and instructively like Hemingway's.

It was for the sense of liberation, for the vision of a new, free, courageous world, that Stevenson, in youth and in maturity, thanked Whitman. In his "Books That Have Influenced Me" he called Leaves of Grass

> A book of singular service, a book which tumbled the world upside down for me, blew into space a thousand cobwebs of genteel and ethical illusion, and, having thus shaken my tabernacle of lies, set me back again upon a strong foundation of all the original and manly virtues.[2]

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practiced it during his student days at Edinburgh to the fullest extent." [David Daiches, Robert Louis Stevenson (Norfolk, Conn., 1947), p. 19.]

[1] "Pulvis et Umbra," in Bowyer and Brooks, The Victorian Age (New York, 1954), p. 778.

[2] Stevenson, Works (London, 1907), XV, 304.

This feeling for newness is constant in Stevenson's writings. In a fragment of autobiography, written in San Francisco in 1880, he reflected upon his "awakening," circa 1871: "I date my new departure from three circumstances: natural growth, the coming of friends, and the study of Walt Whitman."[1] Although the manuscript breaks off before getting to Whitman, Balfour records some notes from one of its earlier pages:

> Whitman: Humanity: L.J.R.: love of mankind: sense of inequality: justification of art: decline of religion: I take to the New Testament: change startling: growing desire for truth: Spencer: should have done better with the New Test."[2]

Much of the turbulence of Stevenson's awareness of the demands of a new world is packed into this quick sketch of notes. If we gloss it sufficiently to note that "New Testament" probably refers to Leaves of Grass (Stevenson titled his first essay "The Gospel According to Walt Whitman") and that "L.J.R." is a reference to the restricted, highly secret Edinburgh club of six members devoted to radical principles and the abolition of the House of Lords[3] --and if we also note here another expression of Stevenson's indebtedness to Spencer[4] in the context of his preoccupation with

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[1]Graham Balfour, Life of Robert Louis Stevenson (London, 1901), I, 86.

[2]Ibid., p. 94.

[3]Ibid., p. 90 n. The letters are presumed to stand for Liberty, Justice, and Reverence.

[4]Stevenson acknowledged his indebtedness to Spencer in "Books Which Have Influenced Me." Cf. also Balfour, pp. 94, 97, 98.

such questions as "inequality," "decline of religion," and "justification of art"--we can see the great deal of coincidence between Whitman in America and the young Stevenson in Edinburgh. Both were looking at a new world.

Stevenson was nowhere very explicit about the nature of the literature of this new world, or about its point of departure from conventional literature. In "The Lantern Bearers," he came close to Whitman's ideal in envisioning a literature which would be optimistic, democratic, and breathing the idea of "the divine in the common":

> The artistic temperament (a plague on the expression!) does not make us different from our fellow-men, or it would make us incapable of writing novels; and the average man (a murrain on the word!) is just like you or me, or he would not be average. It was Whitman who stamped a kind of Birmingham sacredness upon the latter phrase; but Whitman knew very well, and showed very nobly, that the average man was full of joys and full of poetry of his own. And this harping on life's dullness and man's meanness is a loud profession of incompetence; it is one of two things: the cry of the blind eye, I cannot see, or the complaint of the dumb tongue, I cannot utter.[1]

But Whitman himself, for all his inspirational value, could never fully satisfy Stevenson. Increasingly he was torn between admiration and mistrust. At the age of twenty-three he was heady with Whitman's influence and was trying to complete an essay on him for publication. In this period he was wildly enthusiastic.[2]

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[1]Stevenson, Across the Plains (London, 1903), p. 222.

[2]Stevenson, Letters, ed. Sir Sidney Colvin (London, 1924), I, 64, 81, 123.

But he had great difficulties with it; when he finally fought his way through and completed the article five years later, he had produced something cool, measured, non-committal. John Addington Symonds explained this away as a stylistic difficulty[1] --but such an explanation only avoids examining the specific points upon which Stevenson is hesitant or critical.

The essay is, indeed, a curious mixture of tones and styles. In reprinting it (1882) Stevenson apologized for it, calling it a piece "conceived in the noisiest extreme of youthful eloquence."[2] But if this suggests that it was dashed off with youthful impudence, the statement is very misleading. The letters written between 1873 and 1878 reveal the young Stevenson in earnest and decisive struggle with his subject. It is indecision and not stylistic inadequacy that makes the piece uneven. The tone of energetic discovery and revelation, when it falls off, falls off unnaturally into comedy. The redeeming prophet Whitman is suddenly "a large, shaggy dog, just unchained, scouring the beaches of the world and baying at the moon."[3] Or otherwise the

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[1]"My friend, Mr. R. L. Stevenson, once published a constrained and measured study of Walt Whitman, which struck some of those who read it as frigidly appreciative. He subsequently told me that he had first opened upon the keynote of a glowing panegyric, but felt the pompous absurdity of its exaggeration. When the essay was finished in his second style, he became conscious that it misrepresented his own enthusiasm...." (J. A. Symonds, Walt Whitman, pp. 9-10.)

[2]Men and Books, "Preface," p. v.

[3]Ibid., p. 92.

tone shifts to light sarcasm--so light that we cannot be sure what the author's own point is. For example, Stevenson says that Whitman

> conceived the idea of a literature...which was to be, first, human, and next, American; which was to be brave and cheerful as per contract; to give culture in a popular and poetical presentment; and, in so doing, catch and stereotype some democratic ideal of humanity which should be equally natural to all grades of wealth and education, and suited, in one of his favorite phrases, to "the average man."[1]

He could not quite accept Whitman's claim to the office of democratic bard. He mistrusted, for example, Whitman's persistent scrutiny of his own bearings in the world and his insistence upon preaching "his theory of poetry."[2] Nor could he take seriously the picture of this revolutionary, this obviously attractive spiritual hero, in the mantle of a poet: "Whitman loses our sympathy in the character of a poet by attracting too much of our attention in that of a Bull in a China Shop."[3]

Whitman seems to have stimulated Stevenson without converting him. As Stevenson matured, he did not forget his indebtedness, and willingly acknowledged it to the world in "Books That Have Influenced Me." But as he matured he also moved further from Whitman. His tragic vision deepened. "Pulvis et Umbra" was written ten years after "The Gospel According to Walt Whitman." And in the meantime Stevenson had changed in another way: he

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[1] Men and Books, p. 94.

[2] Ibid. [3] Ibid., p. 125.

became, with Henry James, one of the most conscious and deliberate literary craftsmen of the Victorian age.

That strange, deep, sensitive friendship between James and Stevenson, admirably enshrined in Janet Adam Smith's edition of the writers' correspondence, did not only begin with the mutual respect of two writers for the craft of writing. The mutual understanding and love of craft nurtured the friendship right up to Stevenson's death. The touching details--Stevenson's pride in his "Henry James Chair" at Skerryvore, the support and encouragement that two lonely craftsmen could give each other with happy letters that went half-way around the world, the dignified sorrow of James's letters to Fanny Stevenson and to Colvin when Stevenson died--suggest how far from Whitman Stevenson had moved. The vitalism and courage were part of him to the end. But increasingly, in form and content, Stevenson was interested in discipline and hardness. Craftsmanship was also a way of life. There was more to Stevenson than the manly cheerfulness which is celebrated by gurgling school-mistresses. His vision deepened to a sense of tragedy and evil, the sense of human depravity that his Presbyterian background had given him as a child, when he would lie awake nights shuddering at "the evil spirit that was abroad."[1] Colvin, who did much to propagate the image of Stevenson's courageous cheerfulness, came upon him once in the garden at Skerryvore

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[1]Smith, ed., James and Stevenson, p. 35.

and saw "a face of utter despondency, nay tragedy, upon which seemed stamped for one concentrated moment the expression of all he had ever had, or might yet have, in life to suffer or to renounce."[1] It is like James's lifelong "sense of the abyss beneath the fragile surface." Stevenson's depraved Mr. Hyde, who could collide with a little girl at a street-corner, trample calmly over the child's body, and leave her screaming in the street, would have no place in the optimistic world of unleashed human individuality that Whitman prophesied. Evil requires discipline, and the literary treatment of evil requires complexity of devices, form, skill, craftsmanship. Stevenson was driven to a sparse life of artistic dedication by his own half-formed vision of the world. Whitman's democratic heaven was an idle wish, a hopeless panacea. In an age of loose and contrived and superficial novels (Wells, Kipling, and Arnold Bennett, for example), Stevenson and James needed each other.

Those complex feelings in Stevenson which drove him towards James drove him further back from any real faith he might have shared with Whitman in the mass of ordinary men. In 1886 he expressed this to Gosse:

> What the public likes is work (of any kind) a little loosely executed; so long as it is a little wordy, a little slack, a little dim and knotless, the dear public likes it.... There must be something wrong in me, or I would not be popular.[2]

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[1] Smith, ed., James and Stevenson, p. 35. [2] Ibid., p. 28.

And in 1893, the year before he died, his language was even stronger--stronger, too, than Henry James's. The ambivalent hope of "The Lantern-Bearers" in the joys and poetry of the average man had died out. Now Stevenson spoke of the public in this way:

> the British pig returns to his true love, the love of the styleless, of the shapeless, of the slapdash and the disorderly.[1]

V.

There were a few periodicals in the age which were detached enough from class and party to deserve attention in this chapter.

The most important of them is the Academy. Founded in 1869 by Charles E. C. B. Appleton, it was in fact the kind of "national academy" that Arnold had called for in his Culture and Anarchy: a "centre of informed critical opinion." It was a cross between the modern literary supplement and the modern scholarly journal. Among its contributors were Saintsbury, E. K. Chambers, Henry Bradley, Walter Skeat, Augustine Birrell, and Mark Pattison. Although the Academy found it necessary to dilute its intentions and broaden its appeal gradually, it held to fairly high standards of disinterested quality until 1896, when it changed hands and became a merely popular magazine.[2] It held surprisingly well to the policy it announced in 1870: to judge books, "not from an insular,

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[1]Smith, ed., James and Stevenson, p. 28.

[2]John C. Johnson, The Academy, 1869-1896 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1958).

still less from a partisan, but from a cosmopolitan point of view...."[1]

Still, we should remember that the Academy was not completely above political prejudices. No periodical is. It leaned more towards the liberal than the conservative viewpoint. In dealing with American democracy, for example, it attacked the conservative estimates of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen[2] and Sir Henry Maine;[3] it gave only mild approval to Lecky;[4] but it called Lord Bryce's American Commonwealth, which attempted to dispel Tocqueville's thesis about the tyranny of the majority, "one of the few great books of our time."[5] A careful student of the Academy has concluded that "Throughout the years from 1869 to 1896 there were more regular reviewers who supported democracy (though sometimes with strong reservations) than there were those who feared it or held it in contempt."[6]

But in spite of a thinly visible political stamp, the Academy was more of an ivory tower for Victorian scholars and belletrists than were most of its rival publications.

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[1] Academy, II (Oct. 22, 1870), 1.

[2] IV (Aug. 1, 1873), 294.

[3] XXVIII (Nov. 7, 1885), 300.

[4] XLIX (May 2, 1896), 358.

[5] XXXV (Jan. 26, 1889), 49.

[6] John C. Johnson, op. cit., p. 182.

What did it make of Whitman? Apparently the Academy did not think much of Whitman as a symbol and a prophet of cultural reorientation. But it did show him more respect than did many Victorian journals. We have already seen Saintsbury's Academy reviews: a rejection of Whitman's theories coupled with a rare defense of his prosody.[1] The journal continued to be tolerant of Whitman. In 1889 it stated its pleasure in the fact that Whitman was getting some well-deserved attention, especially in Great Britain.[2] A year later it gave its opinion that "Whitman's capacity for inspiration, for prophecy, and for hope is very far ahead of his literary sense"--a reversal of Saintsbury's 1875 estimate. But the last review of Whitman in the Academy was not so far from that 1875 review, after all:

> For those who reject the prophet there yet remains
> the imperishable singer; though it is better still
> both to share his song and believe his vision.[3]

By 1890, it was difficult to "believe his vision," but almost customary to wish that one could believe it.

The Academy reviewed Henry James's works several times. Graphically, its attitude towards James could be represented by a wavy line which rises steadily for ten years and then suddenly falls. Significantly, James fell from favor only after the

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[1]See above, pp. 309-11.

[2]Academy, XXXV (Feb. 23, 1889), 127.

[3]XXXVII (April 5, 1890), 231-232.

magazine had been sold into more commercially ambitious hands--that is, after 1896.

In 1875, reviewing a collection of James's early stories about artists (including the thematically important "Madonna of the Future," which the reviewer liked), the Academy found James reminiscent of, but not imitative of, Hawthorne, and commended him for "entering into Hawthorne's psychology."[1] Another review in the same year got hold of the dramatic significance of James's use of Europe: "There is something pathetic--a sense of yearning as for a birthright withheld...."[2] But it found Roderick Hudson (1876) weak and unrealized,[3] and The American confusing, Balzacian, and uninteresting.[4]

The Academy's first real praise of James came in 1878--early praise, as the pattern of James reviews goes. In reviewing The Europeans, it turned out a very perceptive analysis of James's objective method, pointed out his similarity to Turgenev, and acclaimed his careful suppression of the petty, the obvious, the merely descriptive, and the non-essential. It called The Europeans, with a rare burst of the superlative, "the purest piece of realism ever done."[5]

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[1] Academy, VII (June 12, 1875), 602.

[2] VIII (Oct. 16, 1875), 399.

[3] IX (Feb. 12, 1876), 142-3.

[4] XII (July 14, 1877), 3.

[5] XIV (Oct. 12, 1878), 354.

The review of Portrait of a Lady (1881) is somewhat cooler. James's narrative technique is again carefully explored and respected--but the reviewer was apparently disturbed by James's growing disdain for plot, the "popular element" of fiction.[1] If this was a slur on James, it was redeemed three years later. The Academy defended James from his critics, especially his English critics, who had been "underrating" him. It was James's stance as an American that the critics had overlooked--and James was clearly an American, American in a sense in which Longfellow and even Hawthorne can never be American. This review must have pleased James considerably:

> I am afraid that Mr. James is guilty only of being a good deal keener and cleverer than our own authors, and of writing--as he ought--from his own and not our standpoint.[2]

Not many critics in the mid-1880's were talking that way about Henry James.

In the final decade of the original Academy's life, James was not often mentioned. After 1896, after the sale of the magazine, he fell fast. The standards of mass culture could not be very amenable. He was attacked for writing "for the few";[3] The Sacred Fount was compared unfavorably to Dreiser's Sister Carrie and dismissed as a reductio ad absurdum.[4] And inevitably, the Academy

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[1] Academy, XX (Nov. 26, 1881), 397-8.

[2] XXVI (Dec. 6, 1884), 371.

[3] LI (Feb. 27, 1897), 256.

[4] LXI (Nov. 9, 1901), 429.

with the new face attacked "the essential artistic arrogance of Mr. James's attitude towards his readers."[1]

The Athenaeum, another review with high intellectual aims, a review which began its career with an attack on the Quarterly's policy of mixing politics and critical judgment, had very little to say about Whitman. Though it had no real critical "policy," it was generally favorable to American literature, and approved mildly of the novels of Henry James. Its objections to James were the usual ones--heavy handling of trivial issues, "art for art's sake" themes, thinness, and lack of development.[2] It did see the importance of William Wetmore Story in relation to James's own attitude towards Europe--"it is the relation of the American to Europe intellectually and artistically that constitutes Mr. James's theme"--and it felt assured that James had solved his own problem in a very satisfactory way.[3]

The Bookman, a late-comer which can hardly be called Victorian at all, did a great deal to give some luster to James in the 1890's and in the first decade of the twentieth century. In polished, incisive reviews it made observations like this (to take a few at random):

> Two-thirds of the charm lies in his characteristic style, his mosaic of little phrases...and his

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[1]LXIII (Nov. 8, 1902), 494.

[2]Athenaeum, No. 2658 (Oct. 5, 1878), 431; No. 3274 (July 26, 1890), 124.

[3]No. 3967 (Nov. 3, 1903), 605-6.

> refreshing confidence in the reader's intelligence. He does not explain; he indicates....[1]
>
> [The reader] must take time and trouble. There is no other living writer who could have written [The Awkward Age], who could so patiently and delicately labour to make a fine point, who could deal so sensitively with fine shades, who could analyze the slight so subtly, so wittily.[2]
>
> Of the style, of the subtlety, of the minute care and delicate weaving it is impossible to speak too highly.[3]

And in one review, the Bookman tried to accommodate James to the public with a brilliant explanation of James's "impressionistic" technique.[4] But there was often a sudden, condescending twist at the end of the Bookman's laudatory explanations of James's excellence. Brilliant as James's novels might be, there was always a public to think about. Two of the passages quoted above end in this way:

> There is infinite grace in the detail; there is genuine fun in the observation. But taken as a whole the effect is clumsy and even wearisome. There is ten times too much good stuff. He works a delicate theme to death.[5]
>
> Every one must praise James...the later James...but need we read him? ...The line which separated James from a chess-player is getting very thin.[6]

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[1] Bookman, XIV (Sept., 1898), 166.

[2] XVI (Jan., 1899), 81.

[3] LIII (Dec., 1917), 107.

[4] XXXIX (Nov., 1910), 96.

[5] XVI (Jan., 1899), 81.

[6] LIII (Dec., 1917), 107.

Murray's Magazine, which had published a warm (but not very distinctive) article on Whitman in 1877 and had seen perhaps more than any other critical organ what James was driving at in The Tragic Muse,[1] gave thirteen pages in 1891 to one of the most distinguished articles on James to appear in the century. The article is the first piece of criticism on James to grasp fully and appreciate whole-heartedly the objectivity of James's method. This article is worth looking at in detail; it may be more than coincidence that a number of critics began taking James more seriously after 1891.

The article begins by taking account of the fact that James is not a popularly accepted novelist. He will probably always be denied "the honour of the railway bookstore, or the seventy-thousandth copy of the cheap edition." But this is because he remains objective, aloof from his characters; and the objectivity is the secret of his art. But, the author insists, he cannot be accused of willful obscurity. And then follows a refreshingly extreme statement: "As a fact, we believe that Mr. James flatters his public too much."[2]

It is James's "faultless skill" that makes him an artist.[3] In considering him it is necessary in a very special way to separate the man from the artist. He does not "put his whole soul

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[1] Murray's Magazine, VIII (Sept. 1890), 431-2.

[2] Ibid., X (Nov. 1891), 645. [3] Ibid., p. 648.

into the work"--true enough. But Murray's, joining James in bucking the expressionist tide in Victorian criticism, thought it folly to attack him for this; "...it is his supreme distinction that he invariably includes and excludes as an artist, not as a man."[1]

> In speaking of the work of Mr. Henry James, the first, the imperative thing to be said about it is that it is the work of an artist, and of one with a complete and exhaustive knowledge of his art and resources. Whilst no writer is more vividly modern, Mr. James is, in a sense, an artist as an ancient Greek was an artist; he represses systematically, that is to say, his own personality in view of the work on which he is engaged. By the public, and--shall we say?--by the English public in particular, this supreme quality of workmanship is one of the qualities least esteemed and least appreciated. The generous public hates the Augur's mask; it likes to peep and see the human countenance behind, to shake hands, so to speak, with the wearer, and congratulate him, on having a soul like his own.[2]

James's unique artistry, the article goes on to argue, is a uniquely American contribution to literature. It has the American national stamp upon it--particularly when James is dealing with his international themes. There is a vague

> but no less certain breath of what we may venture to term the American tradition that flutters through Mr. James's volumes; a breath too little deliberate...to be named Puritanism, but associated with a certain conception of the American character that no one has illustrated more happily than Mr. James himself.... /I/t may be summed up...in the impression left by the volumes, as a whole, that the good and evil of the world, indifferent to the author as an artist, are not indifferent to him as a man.[3]

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[1] Murray's Magazine, X (Nov., 1891), 649-50.

[2] Ibid., pp. 641-2. [3] Ibid., p. 654.

Three other belletristic journals will round out the picture. None of these three mentioned Whitman, who was generally less attractive to the belletrists than was James. MacMillan's praised the craftsmanship of James's work, which had "trained English readers to take pleasure in more minute and delicate modes of presentation, in finer and soberer shades of thought, than the average English novelist knows how to reach,"[1] but it also found James's work "too fine, too French" for the English character; it imagined America, looking for salvation from French naturalism, crying out to James,

> Be a little less afraid of failure and extravagance. Stir, impress us, carry us away.... Be a little violent and take us by force.[2]

Sidney Waterlow, in an excellent article in the Independent Review, defended James's method as the proper method of psychological realism which sets out to probe the civilized mind and to analyze human motives. The method, said Waterlow, is artificial only to those who fail to see James's purpose. His style is necessarily complex because the reality it probes is complex.[3] Waterlow's article must have served well to prepare other reviewers for The Golden Bowl, which was published a few months later and which was surprisingly well received. Desmond MacCarthy,

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[1] MacMillan's Magazine, L (August, 1884), 253.

[2] Ibid., p. 254.

[3] Independent Review, IV (Nov., 1904), 236-43.

reviewing The American Scene in the Albany Review (which had merged with the Independent), made an interesting attempt to relate this book to the novels of James. The Americans, he pointed out, had to struggle to reach the amenities; he thought it significant that whatever of James's characters take a short-cut to beauty end up in disaster.[1]

It should be obvious that the scholarly and belletristic periodicals took to James more readily than to Whitman. This is particularly true after about 1890. The dream that Whitman offered the world was fading out, and the excessive claims and bad imitations of the Whitmanites were undoubtedly helping to scare away many intelligent readers. Meanwhile, the meaning and purpose and the implications of James's art were becoming clearer. His difficult and complex "major phase" novels were better received than his early novels; by the time the autobiographical A Small Boy and Others was off the press, at least a handful of significant critics was ready for it and eager for it. Two of the periodicals immediately seized upon a phrase out of James's autobiography[2] and used it as a description of his general method. James's phrase was, "the visiting mind."

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[1] Albany Review, I (April, 1907), 113.

[2] New Statesman, I (June 14, 1913), 315; Times Literary Supplement (April 10, 1913), 150.

VI.

We have noticed in various chapters that by the century's end the old surging liberal optimism had tamed down considerably. Almost parallel to this decline of passion for progress into a new and attainable world is a decline of interest in Whitman. If we set aside for the moment such complicating factors as the increased democratization of British culture (which would, of course, work against James), there is a third line that can be traced: a line that would portray a rise of serious interest in Henry James, especially among the younger generation of belletrists, beginning in the 1890's and rising steadily at precisely the time that James was most vulnerable to attack as being arty, difficult, and over-refined.

We have already taken notice of some of these younger critics: Ford Maddox Ford, for example, and Desmond MacCarthy. To mention two others, Joseph Conrad defended James as "the historian of fine consciences," and insisted that his restriction to fine consciences gave him greater, not less, range, for it is precisely range that is the distinguishing mark of a fine conscience;[1] and George Bernard Shaw, in some of his best maturing prose invective, defended James's play, Guy Domville, from the critics and from "these dunces" in the audience who had hissed so loudly that

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[1]Joseph Conrad, "Henry James: The Historian of Fine Consciences," in Dupee, The Question of Henry James, pp. 62-3.

the theater manager had come out on stage to apologize.[1] True, there were still plenty of people who would agree with Thomas Hardy that James had "a ponderously warm manner of saying nothing in infinite sentences";[2] there were many caustic comments, such as Wells's simile of a hippopotamus picking up a pea; there were parodies, such as Beerbohm's "The Moat in the Middle Distance" and some of the riotous Henry James sentences done for Punch by its gifted parodist editor, Sir Owen Seaman, such as,

> For, what lent a further complexity to the situation was that, even to suppose me arrived at the conclusion, effectively supported, that her motive for this so painfully truncated alliance was commendable, it still left her the liberty, accentuated by the conditions at which I have glanced, to misinterpret mine in congratulating her upon it.[3]

But the number of devoted defenders of James is more noteworthy.

In 1905, Elizabeth Carey came out with the first book-length treatment of James. Her book provided a clear, synthetic focus on James's work. She recognized (before James told the world so in his letters) that soaking in Europe was a kind of American patriotism, for the American horizon had to be enlarged. She recognized the valuable use that James could make of his plight.

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[1] Saturday Review, LXXIX (Jan. 12, 1895), 43-44.

[2] Quoted by Simon Noel-Smith, The Legend of the Master (London, 1947), p. 10.

[3] Owen Seaman, Borrowed Plumes (New York, 1902), pp. 169-70.

> Perhaps it is indeed necessary to belong to the disinherited in order to look on at the overwhelming complicated social spectacle of London with a gaze at once interested and detached.[1]

Rebecca West, too, devoted an early book to James. She echoed James himself on the shortcomings of being born an American:

> The essential thing about Mr. James was that he was an American; and that meant, for his type and generation, that he could never feel at home until he was in exile.[2]

> There was no blinking the fact that in attempting to set up in this unfurnished country Art was like a delicate lady who moves into a house before the plaster is dried on the walls; she was bound to lead an invalid existence.[3]

But although she admired James's work, she missed the fact that it was directly a product of those same "limitations," that James had turned his liabilities into assets. She could not accept the implications of James's orientation towards Europe and the past; it seemed to her a provincially American short-sightedness, a "strange illusion" that the past is preferable to the present. James, she suggested, lacked historical sense: he was unable to perceive that the present at <u>any</u> time is painful.[4] That James, or any American, should feel a need of Europe was to her understandable; but she had little sympathy for James's yearning for

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[1]Elizabeth Cary, <u>The Novels of Henry James</u> (London, 1905), p. 8.

[2]Rebecca West, <u>Henry James</u> (London, 1916), p. 9.

[3]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 10. [4]<u>Ibid</u>., pp. 26-7.

a "visitable past." Miss West's position was a kind of half-way house between the parties of memory and hope.

J. C. Squire, one of the Georgian poets, helped to construct the bridge between Victorian and twentieth century criticism of James. He defended James's obscurity as a necessary obscurity, an obscurity made necessary by the valid demands of the impressionist method. Writing in an age of vagueness and abstraction (surely this characteristic of the age gave Whitman an advantage in drawing out sympathetic vibrations), James, as an artist and as a man of vision, was driven to impressionistic techniques. It was

> the direct product of his passion for clarity. He detested the slipshod sentence which, compact as it may look as a piece of grammar, is a mere pot-shot as a piece of representation. He wanted to make no statement which did not embody precisely what he wanted to say.[1]

The most daring and ingenious of the young James critics at the turn of the century was Dixon Scott, Scott, who was killed in World War I, regarded James as

> certainly the greatest of all living artists (yes, painters and poets swept in) --at once the most profuse and precise, the most affluent and exquisite...[2]

While Scott's standard of judgment is essentially an aesthetic standard, he crossed over (as had Ford) into judging the place of

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[1] J. C. Squire, Books in General (London, 1919), p. 181.

[2] Dixon Scott, Men of Letters, ed. Sir Max Beerbohm (London, 1916), p. 78. (The original essays on James were published in The Bookman.)

James's novels in the modern world.

Scott playfully but enthusiastically claimed that he had found the figure in Henry James's carpet. It was simply humility; it was suggested by James's "simplicity, innocence, eagerness, honesty," by his "monkish love (above all) for things lowly and neglected...."[1] Nobody, Scott insisted, could be further from the meaning of James than Ford, with his idea that James's final message is one of despair. James was not lamenting the passing of a feudal world; he gave us instead, through his brilliant style, "the most 'universal'--the most republican--prose in our literature."

Scott well knew that this was contrary to James's reputation, which was for obscurity, subtlety, over-refinement, and snobbishness. But this misconception, he argued, was caused by an amazing trick played on James by his medium. To explain it called for a paradoxical simile: one must come to James's work as to a cathedral, realizing

> that it was a sweet affection for the earth that sent the whole edifice soaring, and that all this pomp and splendour is at heart a protest against pride.[2]

He went on to show that James's characters, like Searle in his first novel, The Passionate Pilgrim, are worn out by their fine perceptions of the commonplace while we, the readers, "get the

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[1] Men of Letters, p. 80.

[2] Ibid., p. 82.

grail."[1] James seems difficult only because of his richness and his great "hospitality" to shades of meaning. The shifts of focus and the adjustments serve merely to bring the eye closer to "the little universals, the things of daily life." His characters, all really martyrs, must pay a tragic price for the service they give us, "suffering for the sake of the world." They are bruised by the world, and "die that we may live more completely."[2]

But why, if James is the most republican of our prose writers, should he restrict himself to rare, finely cultivated characters? Scott's answer has more than cleverness to commend it: James had to restrict himself to sensitive, finely cultivated characters--because only uncommon eyes can perceive common things vividly. He had to use unusual, even abnormal people to capture with vivid exactness the sense of common things--ordinary things, as distinct from tomahawks and pirates and tigers. Thus, Scott concluded,

> In order to accomplish his democratic task he had to breed a class of rare aristocrats. In order to make his reader see and understand the excellence of the normal human scene he had to usher him into a recondite world of studios and salons and hushed leisure where the faculty of observation is cultivated like an orchid.[3]

The turn-of-the-century critics, with their insistence upon aesthetic quality and their interest in "technique" and their theories about the "necessity" of obscurity and difficulty in

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[1] Men of Letters, p. 84.

[2] Ibid., pp. 85-87. [3] Ibid., p. 89.

literature, are a long way out from their Victorian fathers. There were no great defenders of Whitman in their generation. But James was defended on more than aesthetic grounds, too; this is apparent in Ford, Scott, and Elizabeth Cary as well as in the periodicals. From the 1890's on, the implicit belief is that James's vision offers more than does Whitman's. The older liberals, dying off at the turn of the century along with the spirit that had animated their periodicals, could muster within themselves little more than nostalgia and confused regret--regret that the dream had not come true, or that the world insisted upon awakening them from it. The middle classes were apparently content with their complacency, and went on reading popular novels about virtue rewarded. The old conservatism was becoming emasculated, its periodicals drifting into the marketplace of middle-class morality--though a new conservatism was struggling to the surface, and was to have its fulfillment in the novels of Ford as well as in Hulme and Wyndham Lewis and T. S. Eliot. All these drifts and changes of mood were, of course, gradual; but they are reflected significantly in the belletristic and scholarly reactions to Whitman and James stretching from the Rossettis to Wilde, from Dowden and Symonds to Dixon Scott. Some coalescence of aesthetic theory and social realism and traditional philosophy was at work. And as James's reputation with the belletrists increased, Whitman's declined. Swinburne's rejection of Whitman and Stevenson's admiration for James are almost symbolic of what

happened. Aesthetic criticism cleared the air; but inevitably it passed over into social and philosophical criticism.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CONCLUSION

I.

The Victorian age was an age of flux, of transition. The three great revolutions of the preceding age--the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution--had torn up and modified beliefs and institutions which had been slowly changing ever since the Renaissance. Not just the face but the soul and body of western civilization were being rapidly altered. Something had been destroyed that was not yet replaced; the task of the Victorians, whether they liked it or not, was one of reconstruction. There was general agreement with William Morris's observation that "we not only are, but we feel ourselves to be living between the old and the new."

Although it is only recently that we have become aware of the magnitude of that dizzying sense of transition which the Victorians felt, it is very obviously there, present in the art and literature as well as in the political and social thought. And we should fully expect that it would be there. When men can feel the ground of civilization shifting under their feet, when they know that they live, as Arnold said, between two worlds, one dead and the other struggling to be born, they will inevitably scurry for solid ground. If they could not shut their eyes to the

instability, the vague, dizzy, uncertain lostness of their world, the Victorians had only two directions in which they could move. They could reach back for the old charts and maps or they could follow what they thought (or sometimes only hoped) was a Pillar of Fire guiding them to a promised land. They could try to rediscover the life-force that had held Western civilization together for nineteen hundred years, and hope to nurse it back to vitality, or they could reject the beliefs and institutions of the past as encumbrances and go in free, unshackled, adventurous quest of a New World, a new level of unrestrained human perfection. Carlyle, in Past and Present, went back to the middle ages, as did the Pre-Raphaelites; Arnold tried to revitalize and implement the classical humanist tradition; Browning steeped himself in the Italian Renaissance; Pater and the aesthetes grasped for the pulsating sensations of fleeting moments; Tennyson held tenaciously to his hesitant hopes for progress and the future; a good number of others, less doubt-ridden than Tennyson, shook off the past and marched confidently towards a free, manly, democratic utopia. But the point is, if they were cursed with reflective minds and a sense of purpose, they had to move in one direction or the other. They had either to follow the Pillar of Fire or to come to an understanding with their world and find their bearings in it.

This sense of disturbed orientation can be seen more clearly when we examine the Victorian reaction to American literature. At the same time the Victorians serve to amplify and enlighten the critical issues in American literature--issues which have since

become part of the complex of modern Western literature as a whole.

II.

The Victorians, driven by their need for bearings in a revolutionized world, had to take interest in what was going on in the cultural laboratory of democratic, middle-class America. Whether they sought a utopian pattern or stern warnings of doom, America, a freed extension of European liberalism, was an important focal point. "That cradle of the future," George Eliot called it; Matthew Arnold, cultural conservative to the core, agreed.

The general criticism of American culture, theoretical and usually detached from specific, practical analysis of pieces of American literature, gives us our first flash of insight into an unexplored area of the Victorian mind. At about mid-century, the general critics and scholars shifted noticeably from superior disdain to enthusiastic hope for American culture. Even Arnold was incapable of disdain; Mackay and Harriet Martineau and Lord Bryce were increasingly enthusiastic. The same shift can be detected in some of the more learned periodicals--even in the Tory Quarterly Review. If this growing confidence in the potentialities of democratic culture has no relationship to American cultural achievements, how can we account for it? Obviously, the orientation towards a New World was gaining momentum. Significantly, it grew most rapidly among the general critics and the

scholars; a number of Victorian scholars were attracted to Whitman (and none were attracted to the Europeanized James). We will come back to the point later, but is it not plausible that the general critics of culture and the scholars, by the nature of their work more aware of the mapless confusion of the age, flung themselves more readily into the hopeful optimism of "New World" orientation, simply because their need for some orientation was greater than the need felt by many of their contemporaries?

III.

The pattern of practical criticism of American literature is more complex. It does not follow the same line from disdain to hopefulness. But we can, in summary, notice a few identifiable patterns in the complex which give us a fuller understanding both of the Victorians and of the nature of American literature. A study of the reception of Whitman and James is especially revealing.

For these two do represent really opposite impulses in American culture. Whitman, like Thoreau, represents a literature and hence a civilization which "must walk towards Oregon, and not towards Europe." The "I" in Whitman's poems, the voyaging ego, the innocent Adam, the New Man, free of the forms and beliefs and institutions that have chained him in the dark and guilty European past, must make his glorious effort to discover and achieve the deification which nature intended for him. His isolation from Europe and the past is his most precious freedom. He will create

a New World, an organic society of free individuals who find perfection through individualism, affection, democracy, science, and optimism. He will create for and out of this Paradise a new literature which is likewise unregulated, organic, natural--a literature of the people and for the people. Henry James, on the other hand, rejecting "The American Dream" (which is also the European romantic dream), rejecting Emerson's party of Hope, is closer to the major writers who preceded him: Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville. The westward orientation, the vista of the frontier and the future, seemed to James too narrow; it excluded the major problem of American experience: the relationship of the New World to the Old. There was in James, too, a sense of evil--and if evil is real, Emerson and Whitman are untenable. James saw as clearly as did Whitman that American literature, like the world of the nineteenth century, had to take its bearings. James looked to the achievements and the rich complexity of Europe. The uniqueness of the American writer had to be his ability for detachment in probing and penetrating and understanding and communicating the meaning of Europe; he could be the complete European--something no Frenchman or Englishman or German could be. This to James was the great commission of the artist who was born as an American. It was a commission that demanded dedication and discipline and craftsmanship, and the first approach to it in fiction was the "international theme." The orientation of American civilization had to be eastward, back to the roots, deep into the tradition of Western civilization. The life and pulse could

be, and had to be, restored.

IV.

The response of the Victorians to Whitman reveals quite vividly the degree of disorientation in the latter half of the nineteenth century and at the same time puts an interpretation upon him of which we in the twentieth century are not always aware. Most of Whitman's friends and advocates in Britain were attracted to the hope and optimism of his dream. Whitman's acceptance, wrote William Clarke, depends on whether we accept the advent "of a new world; on whether we really believe that the old forms are exhausted." In a society of commonplaces and utility and confusion and disintegrating faiths, it was the vision of Whitman's free new world that first caught the attention. Here was the "pure clear voice" that James Bryce had said would come to expression in America. To a man, Whitman's British advocates were captured first by the bold vision of a new world of expansive human potentiality.

The point needs emphasis. Psychologically, the Victorians needed a frontier as badly as the Americans did. It was not just the off-beat radicals such as Carpenter and Buchanan who saw, respectively, "an era of unexampled glory" and at long last "the poetry of humanity newly dawning." Symonds, with all his polish of culture and education, was disheartened by the decay he saw everywhere; Whitman, he said, helped him to see "for the first time with sane eyes." Swinburne and Stevenson, who later

defected, were drawn first by the dreamlike optimism of a spiritual frontier. The aesthetes, advocates of pure form in the arts, contradicted their own critical standards to make room for the rough, natural, primitive lines of Whitman--again, because they needed the vision, the optimism. Although the thing that attracted men to Whitman usually at the same time attracted them to extreme political liberalism, the spell that Whitman cast could even in some case jump party lines: Powell, the Tory historian, was attracted by Whitman's convictions that progress is a natural law and that evil has no real existence; and the Quarterly gracefully shed its Toryism to support the claims of Whitman's "democratic" American literature over those of the "cultured" school. George Saintsbury stood almost alone in attacking Whitman's orientation while admiring the formal achievement of his poetry.

Most of Whitman's advocates, once they were drawn by the vision of a new orientation, raised only minor objections to the roughness of his work. Nor did they do much in the way of formal analysis and defense. Their interest was quite frankly didactic. Two such natural opposites as Edward Carpenter and Oscar Wilde could agree: in Whitman the form vanishes in the meaning.

The need for some sense of direction, then, is strongly revealed in the critics who accepted Whitman. We can take it a step further: in some cases a forced and strained liberalism is apparent. Both Saintsbury and W. M. Rossetti noticed some sham and artifice in Swinburne's republicanism, and noticed it before Swinburne exchanged coats, turned aristocrat, and attacked the

American poet whom he had once lavished with excessive praise. We can now see the same straining, the same leap into hopefulness, in others. Both Symonds and Dowden talked about Whitman's optimism not as truth, but as an antidote, a cure. Stevenson, Standish O'Grady, Powell, and Roden Noel seem moved by a similar impulse; convinced or not of the rectitude of Whitman's vision, they grasped at it as men will grasp at some rope, any rope, to pull themselves out of the sea.

The more intelligent of Whitman's detractors also had a firm grasp of the meaning and the implications of his new world and his new literature. Excluding the merely partisan Tories and the merely shocked middle classes, there were able critics who thought Whitman a dangerously ruthless and impractical prophet who might usher in the ruination of Western civilization. These men, too, were in search of cultural bearings; they sought them in an understanding and appropriation of Western traditions. Pater Bayne is the most articulate of these conservatives. He argued (as Mr. Eliot argued forty years later) that the literature of the Western world forms a whole, and that each piece of literature is in organic relationship to the whole and to all other pieces of literature. Whitman's democratic art, appealing to the masses and violating this organic relationship, could only cut the modern world further adrift--adrift in a dream-world in which it is pretended that evil does not exist. The Spectator's position was similar: Whitman's denial of evil was an idle romantic dream. It separated him not just from Europe (this would be justifiable)

but from reality. Other critics (Gosse and Leslie Stephen, for example, and even some of the radical periodicals) mistrusted the concept of a popular art in a wholly classless democratic society.

V.

In the British reception of James the problem of orientation is less clearly defined. Until almost the turn of the century the critics did more to obscure than to clarify James's place in American and in modern literature. Many of them either forgot that James was an American, or missed the themes of his novels and their carefully constructed points of view, or grumbled about immorality and excessive refinement. The indication is clear that the Victorians looked to American literature for a very different kind of uniqueness than the kind that James had to offer. America was facing west, and the Victorians generally assumed that all her writers did likewise. His early books, a good clue to his intentions as an American writer, were often left out of the picture. The Victorians did not often see, until the 1890's, that James was a spokesman for an alternate cultural orientation, an orientation which had a good deal in common with the thought of Matthew Arnold and yet one which could probe in a new way the meaning of Europe.

In studying the reception of James we can again see the extent to which many Victorians were looking hopefully to the West and the future. James seemed to many of them a kind of snobbish traitor, a man born free at the edge of a frontier who turned his

back on the glowing future and walked deliberately into the enslavement of a sickly, demoralized, pampered, artificial world--the very world that they themselves were trying to leave behind. The radicals either scorned him or ignored him.

But James did not fare very well anywhere on the British political spectrum for at least twenty years. The conservatives did not recognize him as a spokesman, partly because they did not understand him, partly because his refinements and subtleties seemed detached from "real life," and partly because they too expected something more uniquely American. They attacked his "pessimism" and his "artiness" as vigorously as such radicals as H. G. Wells and Robert Buchanan did.

In the 'nineties, however, a handful of careful, essentially belletristic articles on James cleared the way for an understanding of his meaning and its implications. The difficult and complex novels of James's "major phase" were better received than his earlier novels. As the twentieth century opened, the nature of James's "dispatriation" was becoming clear. The orientation towards which James had been pressing was finally visible, and could finally be discussed as a meaningful alternative for American and for modern European literature.

James's rise at the end of the century is interesting. At this point we must again pick up Whitman, look at both writers, and take hold of two important questions: (1) Does the reception given Whitman and James show any significant trends or characteristics moving through or underneath the Victorian age as the

Victorians sought their own orientation? (2) Do the Victorian reactions to American literature shed any light on twentieth-century literature?

VI.

From 1856 to 1892 there is no definite, remarkable shift pro or con in the British attitude towards Whitman. There is in this same period, we have noticed, a growing confidence among general cultural critics in the strength and potential of American culture and literature. Whitman was apparently a very insignificant factor. Most general critics ignored him while his literary reputation ran at even keel.

But there is in the 1890's a very definite change in the mood of the Victorian mind. Perhaps it is only that mood long ago denominated fin de siecle. It is a mood of growing hopelessness and despair. There are extremely interesting overtones of it among the liberals and radicals, the dreamers, the writers and critics and thinkers who had turned to the west and the future and the hope of a new Adam in a new Paradise. For many of them something had gone wrong. Directly or indirectly, Whitman was involved.

The fading of Swinburne's enthusiasm for Whitman and for Whitman's prophecy of the art and life to come may be as prophetic as Swinburne once thought Whitman was. Gloom set in in many unexpected places. Between 1876 and 1892, Gosse became completely disenchanted with Whitman and democratic culture.

Buchanan saw a new dawn in the 1860's; in the 1880's he sneered at James, a dandy who was ruined by culture and pessimism and would have "no place in modern literature." But in 1899 Buchanan resigned himself to the vague hope that the world might prove after all to be a fairyland. "The Dream of perfection," he announced, "is over." James, who had "no place in modern literature," was just catching the attention of serious young critics. The Westminster Review reflected the same mood in the same year. Hesitantly and sadly the Westminster let Whitman go, observing that his denial of evil made his vision seductive but untenable. The article is almost a tired and disillusioned sigh. "If only America were all that he sings!" The dream of perfection which had sustained the Westminster for eighty years was hanging by a thread in 1899. Fourteen years later the magazine died. Edward Dowden, who had always been hesitant about Whitman's orientation but had let his need of it overpower his scholar's instincts, confessed in old age that he had been too reckless. The Quarterly, bereft of its Tory stamp, broke its paradoxical tradition of support for "the democratic school" in American literature and published an important article by Morton Fullerton which attacked the drift towards mass culture and brilliantly advanced the cause of Henry James. Stevenson, once strongly attracted to the vigor and freedom and vital optimism of Whitman, had already in the 'eighties given himself up to the practice of the brittle, hard craftsmanship that his own deepening vision demanded of him. A few years into the twentieth century, with the air cleared by

belletristic critics, Ford Maddox Ford and Rebecca West and Dixon Scott explained the importance of Henry James to modern literature. At the end of one confused era and the beginning of another, quite independent of any parallel political shifts, a significant shift in the literary world had taken place. Whitman's vision had failed to hold its charm.

There are other less significant conclusions about the thinking and feeling of the Victorians that can be drawn from this study. They should be set down briefly. For one thing, the idea of class and tradition was not just a Tory idea. Matthew Arnold is not the only proof of the statement. There is W. E. H. Lecky. There is the Whig Edinburgh Review and the liberal London and Westminster reviews. These liberals and more stood in fear of a world stripped of classes and traditions. Many others (Stevenson in his youth, Dowden, and even Symonds) swallowed their fears with something less than conviction. Again some cases of strained, forced, artificial liberalism seem to suggest themselves. This may help to explain why the dream of perfection vanished so quickly from so many at century's end.

Secondly, we should notice an odd fact: Whitman, who regarded himself as a democratic bard, a people's poet, got the attention of quite a few scholars and professors; James, a writer of refined sensibilities and intellect, got the attention of none. This too would seem to indicate something about the compelling magnetic strength of the new orientation that Whitman offered the world. The scholars felt more desperately than others the

uncertainties of the age. They had a commensurately greater need for a way out, a hope. They looked to America, not just for an interesting body of literature upon which they could operate, but for hope. James could only bring them closer to a world they wished to reject.

A final point about the Victorians: the didacticism of their criticism blinded them not only to Henry James (before the 'nineties, at least) but also to the real worth of Whitman's poetry. They wrote almost nothing worth reading today about Whitman's poetic achievement. The choice was a simple one: damn him as a barbarian or praise him in superlatives which could slip easily and vaguely into praise of his content. The only variation was the frequent mild apology for his formlessness--almost as though it did not really matter. The aesthetes, who meant to counteract the strong didacticism of the age and deal with pure form--apart, even, from nature, which was inferior--trapped themselves into confusion and contradiction. Affinity of spirit, not pure form, attracted them to Whitman, Their own critical grounds could never justify the choice.

VII.

We are left with our final question: What connection can be established between these two contending literary movements and the Victorian attitudes they uncover, on the one hand, and on the other the modern literature which grew out of or displaced them? The full answer to that question would doubtless have many parts.

But the principle and most interesting part is this: the formal movement in contemporary literature towards sparsity and hardness and economy, and the thematic movement towards purposelessness and guilt and the need for redemption, have very clear origins in the Victorian inheritance.

There had been plenty of noisy predictions of what modern literature would be like. Overwhelmingly the Victorians looked to America for a portent. Even those who detested what they saw, saw in Whitman and in the regionalist fiction writers the sign of the times. But they were overwhelmingly wrong. Carpenter, who predicted that Whitman would be "read and lovingly absorbed by the millions as time goes on," was almost as far off as were Whitman and Tolstoy, who predicted the same kind fate for Carpenter. Only a few daring young belletrists at the turn of the century, among them Conrad and Ford, ventured to suggest that there was something worth considering in that <u>other</u> stream of American literature, with its techniques of analysis and exploration, its careful weaving, its refinement, and its artistic discipline.

The majority of Victorians who looked to America and made their predictions were wrong. The heritage left to young men growing up in the early 1900's was a heritage of shock and disruption, of exploded myths and shattered dreams. The better the dream, the harder the awakening. The Victorian dream of perfection, spun as a soft protection against the hard facts of a world that had lost its bearings and needed a faith, suddenly vanished. "The Dream of perfection is over." We can see more and more

clearly a rupture between the Victorians and ourselves. The rupture was pronounced necessary and good and final by T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, T. S. Eliot, and others. (Significantly, two of these four are expatriate Americans.) Our literature reflects with increasing unanimity an altered attitude. The major intellectual activity of our time, one critic has summarized, "has been that of becoming disencumbered of the gigantic inheritance of the Victorians." In Whitman's time, Mr. Eliot has said, "it was possible to hold to certain notions, and many illusions, which are now untenable." Contemporary American poetry, comments Mr. Delamore Schwartz, is a protest against "the forced smiles (and the whistling in the dark) of dogmatic optimism."

But the new things that began happening to our literature in about 1912--a new classicism, a pronounced respect for political conservatism, a revaluation of liberal and humanist post-Renaissance thought, a sense of evil as a metaphysical reality, and in many cases a return to the orthodox Christian tradition--had been planted in the Victorian age. Contemporary writers, though they usually cast back only to Hopkins or to the seventeenth century, had their fore-runners, writers and critics who sensed the illusory character of the transcendentalist impulse, in the nineteenth century.

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Materials in periodicals have been listed by author (when known) or by title (when the author is not known) only in the case of articles. Book reviews and parts of articles have not been listed by author or title. Thus the entries beginning with the name of the periodical are meant to suggest reviews or parts of articles.

The bibliography has been divided into six sections, as follows: I--American Literature and Its Orientation; II--General Works: The Victorians and American Literature; III--The Victorians and Walt Whitman: Books; IV--The Victorians and Walt Whitman: Articles and Reviews; V--The Victorians and Henry James: Books; VI--The Victorians and Henry James: Articles and Reviews.

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VICTORIAN CRITICS AND THE ORIENTATION OF AMERICAN LITERATURE, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE RECEPTION OF WALT WHITMAN AND HENRY JAMES

by

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A Thesis
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of the requirements for the degree
of
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Are you really of the whole People?
Are you not of some coterie? Some school
or mere religion?

--Walt Whitman

We are the disinherited of art!

--Henry James

PREFACE

In this thesis I have attempted to survey a large, general philosophical problem--the problem of cultural orientation--as it came to expression in the interaction of two vital cultures over a period of more than fifty years.

Perhaps survey is the wrong verb. It implies the impossible, or at least the inadvisable, for so broad a study. I have felt free to select and exclude. To cite a few exclusions, I have left out Tennyson, Browning, James Thomson, and William Archer. I also eliminated, along with scores of minor periodicals and articles, the Fortnightly Review, for example, and the Pall Mall Gazette. The eliminations were not merely arbitrary; I eliminated materials which are of only slight value to the question this thesis explores (Tennyson's friendly correspondence with Whitman, for example) and other materials which could only serve to repeat points already made in the thesis.

One apology to the British reader: I have found it convenient (if not necessary) to conform to American spellings throughout this thesis.

My indebtedness to others ranges far. In two cases its expression comes too late to be received. The late Dr. Henry Zylstra, former Chairman of the Department of English at Calvin College, was the first to arouse my interest in the basic

intellectual and spiritual conflicts inherent in modern literature. The late Professor W. L. Renwick, my original research advisor, was very helpful, especially in the difficult task of limiting and keeping under control the vast research materials to which I had access. As befitted his notion of scholarship, he left me free with the books; he did not try to lead me down a path of his own. I am also indebted to Mr. Hilary Corke and to Dr. A. Melville Clarke for valuable and painstaking criticisms of an earlier draft. I have benefited from the devotion of my wife; I have also benefited from the encouragement of my colleagues on the faculty at the University of Maryland. Finally, I am indebted to the staffs of the following libraries for their efficient help in locating research materials: the National Library of Scotland, the British Museum, the Library of the University of Edinburgh, the Library of Congress, and the Theodore McKeldin Library at the University of Maryland.

College Park, Md.
April 11, 1962

CONTENTS

PART ONE:

American Literature and Western Civilization

CHAPTER ONE

ON ORIENTATION

I.

It is becoming more and more evident that American literature raises important questions about the state of modern culture in general, questions which have almost prophetic bearing on the whole of modern western civilization. The situation is almost paradoxical, for in almost every era of American literature there has been a strong impulse towards isolation, towards separation from the rest of the world. But now the Americans, still shedding the national tradition of isolation and only beginning to shed consciously the national myth of Adamic innocence, turn more often to Europe--only to be often shocked to discover that in many ways they have been a kind of European avant garde all along.

There are good reasons for this strange turn-about. Perhaps the primary one is that American literature, which has always come out of a heated dialogue between two faiths, two parties, what Emerson called the party of memory (oriented towards Europe and the past) and the party of hope (oriented towards the untamed frontier and the future), explores an intellectual crisis which is now as European as it is American. The mind of Europe tends to split itself into the same two halves. Whether this identity of cultural predicament is for Europe "progress" or "decline," "catching up" or, in Mr. T. S. Eliot's phrase, "advancing

progressively backwards," is not now our concern. The simple fact is that the political, social, and cultural developments of the past 250 years have drawn European and American writers closer to the same perspective than they could have been in, say, 1815. In the words of a recent French critic, America has become the Noah's Ark of Europe, just as Europe was once the Noah's Ark of the Byzantine Empire.[1]

Manifestations of this sense of cultural identity are not difficult to find, or to account for. Consider, for example, the fact that American culture in the nineteenth century was a kind of orphan culture; its physical isolation from its European parents gave its literature, in addition to "freedom," a psychological complex of homelessness, loneliness, and spiritual quest. Now, in the twentieth century, the sense of isolation from tradition and the values of the past, the feeling of <u>depaysement</u>, has become a haunting part of the litany in the entire body of the literature of western man. It is perfectly natural that Hawthorne and Melville, who shaped their creative visions under the stress of physical isolation, should now be revered on both sides of the Atlantic by writers who shape their creative visions under the stress of spiritual and intellectual flux. The parent Europe has been pushed along to the same frontiers that her radical, exiled, experimenting children had begun to explore in

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[1]R. L. Bruckburger, <u>Image of America</u> (New York, 1959), p. 5.

America in the eighteenth century. The old parent, with understandable apprehension but with occasional secret hope of finding guidance, turns to look at its big, noisy offspring across the ocean.

But European, and especially English interest in American culture and literature did not wait for the twentieth century. It was always recognized that something important was going on in the American social laboratory. American thought and institutions were, after all, conceived and molded in Europe; the American Revolution itself, as Burke reminded his contemporaries, and as Tennyson reminded his, was fought in the name of English liberty, demanding the guarantees of the English Constitution. The British knew that they were looking at an extension of themselves and that great issues were at stake.

American writers, for their part, were from the start self-conscious about their relationship to European civilization. The drive for a "new literature" began early, usually as a part of the drive for a peculiarly "national literature." The first difficulty was that there was no real <u>natus</u> to express. While some writers (as we shall see) insisted that America could survive culturally only by remaining a part of Europe, others advocated starting from scratch to create an independent, self-sufficient culture. Orientation was the major problem of American culture until at least 1900, and the background to the problem is deep and complex. While Prescott taught that America was a European product, necessarily learning her lessons from

two thousand years of classical and European history, Thoreau sat quietly at Walden Pond, looking westward, defiantly free of the accumulated wrongs of human history; and others of Thoreau's mind grouped themselves about the editorials of the Democratic Review, which gave its opinion in 1839 that "our national birth was the beginning of a new history...which separates us from the past and connects us with the future only."[1] Most of what is great in American literature, Professor R. W. B. Lewis has argued in The American Adam,[2] has come out of the tension between hope and memory, from writers who responded ambivalently to the dialogue, who caught sight of the dramatic complexities and were forced to treat them ironically. Hawthorne, Melville, and Henry James come first to mind. In any case, throughout the history of American literature, the tension between past and future, guilt and innocence, east and west, discipline and freedom is there. But it is there because America was a radical European experiment, an experiment conducted with few laboratory controls, an experiment into which Europe threw the contending ingredients of its own heritage: the classicists, Calvin, Locke, Rousseau, and so forth. In America, these could contend without the weighty control of traditions and institutions.

Obviously, the questions raised in America about the value of the past, the shape of democratic literature, the possibilities

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[1] V, 89.

[2] Chicago, 1955, Ch. I.

of a literature in a mass culture, the innocence or essential evil of man, were also being raised in Victorian England. But American ideology (liberal-democratic) and American mood (isolationist in regard to Europe, and therefore in regard to the past) gave them a peculiar pointedness and urgency, and at times a degree of clarity not found in the abstract discussions of Europe.

This is only to suggest that an investigation of British reactions to the essential problems of American literature in the nineteenth century has more than mere academic interest. As American literature struggled through the century, pulling itself in two different directions, it provided the Victorians with a topic which could have helped them to clarify their thinking about themselves. If the literature of the last half of the nineteenth century is the threshold to modern literature, the present study might serve to sweep a little of the dust from that threshold by revealing writers and critics, both British and American, at work with a set of questions about literature and society which are now patent but which were, at the time, just becoming articulate. The Victorian response to those questions has done much to shape contemporary literature.

First we must take a fuller look at the general problem of the American artist as he tried to relate himself to his materials, to his own world, and (what is not always the same thing) to the world of western civilization.

II

If a single word is needed to express the essential problem of the American writer, the word orientation will serve best. To orient himself, to get his bearings in the world: it is this that he has had to do and must still do. The word may be taken quite literally; it is essentially a matter of direction, of facing east or facing west, facing Europe or the frontier. The word smacks a little of the rhetoric of the over-eager scholar; perhaps, as a summarizing word, it has more of convenience than of accuracy to commend it. But lest it be thought that this is nothing more than a conveniently tidy construction designed to hold together a little system with schools and movements, we do well to pause for a moment and listen to Thoreau. Orientation is clearly a problem for him in spite of his ready solution; in his usual manner he moves it along gently from a particular, physical problem to a general, spiritual and intellectual problem:

> I turn round and round irresolute sometimes for a quarter of an hour, until I decide, for the thousandth time, that I will walk into the southwest or west. Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free.... I believe that the forest which I see in the western horizon stretches uninterruptedly toward the setting sun, and there are no towns or cities in it of enough consequence to disturb me.... ever I am leaving the city more and more and withdrawing into the wilderness.

And he knows, too, that he is talking about America, not just about Thoreau.

> I should not lay so much stress on this fact if I did not believe that this is the prevailing tendency of my

> countrymen. I must walk toward Oregon and not toward Europe.[1]

This question of orientation, of great importance throughout the nineteenth century, was already being raised in the era of Franklin, and already in the literature of that period two streams of American cultural thought can be detected. One of them, which can be represented by the Pope-like couplets of William Cliffton, veils its despair in the thin hope that a saving remnant will preserve culture and stave off barbarism in the American wilderness.

> In these cold shades, beneath the shifting skies,
> Where Fancy sickens, and where Genius dies,
> Where few and feeble are the Muses' strains,
> And no fine frenzy riots in the veins,
> There still are found a few to whom belong
> The fire of virtue and the soul of song.[2]

The other stream, of which Franklin himself must be considered an inconsistent part, and out of which come Thoreau, Whitman, and Sandburg, is strongly optimistic in its assertion that American arts, freed from the traditions of the old world, will not only flourish but will supersede the arts of Europe. Here, for example, is Philip Freneau, writing just after the Revolution:

> Now shall the adventurous muse attempt a theme
> More new, more noble, and more flush of fame
> Than all that went before.

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[1] The Writings of Henry David Thoreau (Boston, 1906), IX, 221-2.

[2] William Cliffton, "To William Gifford, Esq.," in Gifford, The Baviad and the Maeviad (Philadelphia, 1799), p. v.

These streams form the debate which runs through the whole of American literature. Their courses are not straight, and the streams often cross each other; but each stream maintains some kind of identity, and each stream widens and cuts deeper as the nineteenth century progresses. As we shall see in the next chapter, American writers in the nineteenth century were aware of their predicament as Americans and tended either to revel in or to react against their cultural isolation.

Again it must be emphasized that these two streams do in fact exist and can in fact be studied. To interpret American literary history in terms of this dichotomy has its dangers, and these dangers become increasingly apparent in contemporary criticism. There are exceptions and overlappings, and there is the fact that many great pieces of American literature come from neither side of the debate, but from the dramatic and ironic inability of the author to choose between them. Still, the choice, whether it is made or not, is between identifiable minds and traditions. The split character of American literature is evident within single authors (Melville, Cooper, and Hawthorne, for example) as well as in pairs of "opposites" (Whitman and James, Sandburg and Eliot, Wolfe and Katherine Ann Porter). Europeans in particular have difficulty understanding how deep the split is and how crucial the choice is between, say, Whitman and James. In spite of James's own modulated praise of Whitman, with all its

revealing turns,[1] the fact is (or has been) that the high valuation of the one is so incongruous with the high valuation of the other that, as Mr. Philip Rahv[2] points out, "criticism is chronically forced to choose between them--which makes for a break in the literary tradition without parallel in any European country." The only thing remotely comparable is the split between "Europhiles" and Slavophiles in Russian Literature. Those who accept, say, Whitman and Mark Twain as types of the American writer are likely, another critic tells us, "to disparage or even read out of the national literature writers whose sense of America is more complex--for example, T. S. Eliot and Henry James."[3] V. L. Parrington, whose influence on our conception of American culture is regarded by Professor Trilling as unequaled,[4] did in fact read James out of American literature.[5] He also found the

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[1]James's statement, recorded by Edith Wharton in Backward Glance (New York, 1934), p. 186, shivers with hesitancy, irony, and even sarcasm. James mocked Whitman's extravagance and his "too extensive acquaintance with foreign languages," but he liked to read him aloud. His statement that Whitman is the greatest American poet of the century must be judged by our knowledge of what James thought of American poets.

[2]Philip Rahv, Image and Idea (Norfolk, Conn., 1949), p. 3.

[3]F. W. Dupee, The Question of Henry James (New York: Holt, 1945), 21.

[4]Trilling's account of the popularity is interesting. Parrington's Main Currents, he says, is attractive to teachers who suppose themselves to be "opposed to the genteel and the academic and in alliance with the vigorous and the actual." (The Liberal Imagination [New York, 1950], p. 3.)

[5]See below, p. 104.

problem of Poe to lie "quite outside the main current of American thought,"[1] and dismissed Hawthorne as "the extreme and finest expression of the refined alienation from reality that in the end palsied the creative mind of New England."[2] But there is the other side, too. The question to which Henry James devoted his artistic life, counters Professor Leon Edel, is "the very question that at our mid-century has become America's primary concern. The question is quite simply the relation between America and the world."[3]

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[1] V. L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York, 1930), II, 58.

[2] Ibid., II, 450.

[3] Leon Edel, "Introduction," The American Essays of Henry James (New York, 1956), p. xv

CHAPTER TWO

NEW MEN AND LOST MEN IN NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA

The dialogue between two kinds of mind, between two kinds of American experience, between two visions of the American as a social and cultural being is clearly evident in nineteenth century American literature. Some writers speak as new men, men who face the West and the future; others speak entirely as lost men, lonely men, men who face Europe and the past. Most of them speak from both perspectives at once--or otherwise interchangeably. But all of them were seeking orientation.

The bifurcation is obvious and pronounced from 1815 onwards. It can be seen already in the work of Irving and Cooper. Irving, who established his reputation as a writer who could create charming literature out of native American materials, followed his Salmagundi and Knickerbocker's History of New York with three "European" books: The Sketch Book, Bracebridge Hall, and Tales of a Traveller. The concern of these last three books is almost entirely with the old in Europe; their sweetness and persuasive charm convince us that Irving was satisfying a deep hunger for cultural tradition. And the hunger was undoubtedly shared by his American readers; by 1850 they had read through sixteen editions of The Sketch Book, eleven editions of

Bracebridge Hall, and ten editions of Tales of a Traveller.[1] Fenimore Cooper also shifted his perspective. Even in his earlier books, where he is a staunch defender of American republicanism, he stole an occasional glance towards Europe and lamented the restrictions he felt as an American writer:

> There is scarcely an ore which contributes to the wealth of an author that is found here in veins as rich as in Europe. There are no annals for the historian; no follies...for the satirist; no obscure fictions for the writer of romance....[2]

After 1837 (the year of Emerson's famous plea at Harvard for an American literature and the year of the founding of the Democratic Review), the glance towards Europe became a steady longing gaze. Gleanings in Europe (1837) shows a new degree of discomfort and estrangement. In two later books, Homeward Bound and Home as Found, he attacked American vulgarity and expressed his distrust of majority rule. We have to remind ourselves of what our schoolteachers always forgot to tell us about the Leatherstocking Tales: that Natty Bummpo, beautiful child of the forests, died silently and stoically on the edge of the American waste land, having "earned his way" prosaically in the last years as a mere trapper; and that Chingachgook, the noble savage, ended up as Injun John,

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[1]Christof Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James (Dallas, 1958), p. 12.

[2]James Fenimore Cooper, Notions of the American (Boston, 1828), quoted by W. E. Sedgwick, "The Materials for an American Literature: a Critical Problem in the Early Nineteenth Century," Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature, XVII (1935), 142-143.

the village drunk. For Cooper, the American dream, the Adam myth, was dissipated; his association with Europe had complicated the picture of America by magnifying the power of his vision. The simplicity of Cooper's westward orientation had broken down, and his final, total attitude towards east and west was one of ambivalence.

Channing, Emerson, and others were reacting against the wistful yearning for historical depth, complexity, and culture when they launched the campaign for a fresh, vigorous, manly native literature. Emerson's Harvard Divinity School lecture protests the idea of a dependent culture. In its spirit as well as in its cataloguing it seems a clear prophecy of Whitman. "We have yet no genius in America," Emerson said,

> with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw, in the barbarism and materialism of our times...banks and tarriffs, the newspapers and caucus, methodism and unitarianism, are flat and dull to dull people, but rest upon the same foundations of wonder as the town of Troy, and the temple of Delphos, and are as swiftly passing away. Our logrollings, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes and Indians...the wrath of rogues and the pusillanimity of honest men, the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon and Texas, are yet unsung. Yet America is a poem in our eyes...and it will not wait long for metres.[1]

Noah Webster and Edward Everett shared Emerson's hope for new men in a new Paradise. Thoreau, who was regarded by Emerson as the

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[1]Quoted by Holbrook Jackson, Dreamers of Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Nineteenth Century Idealism (New York, 1949), p. 15.

truest American because "his aversion from England and European manners and tastes almost reaches contempt,"[1] was indeed not alone in walking "toward Oregon and not toward Europe." But the dream that inspired so many men to look to the west and to the future--the dream that had begun already in Europe before the first American settlements--had to be made real. In Walden, Thoreau performed the ritual of rebirth which is a necessary preface to the new man as Whitman saw him in Leaves of Grass.

That Emerson was confused by the work of Hawthorne is not difficult to understand. For Hawthorne was caught in the web of the dialogue and could only break out of it and use his creative energies by weaving back and forth, from one side to the other, drawing from each and treating each with twists and knots of irony. He was for some time a Salem recluse; but he was also for seven years a resident of Europe, torn by wavering feelings of attraction and revulsion. He tried hard to hold to the vision of the new society, the American Paradise, but yet he was always held entranced by the feeling of the past. Witness "Doctor Grimshawe." Still better, look at his story "Earth's Holocaust." The story opens with a cosmic bonfire on a western prairie. As the crowd's enthusiasm mounts, all the symbols of royalty and aristocracy are thrown to the flames, and finally the whole body of European literature and philosophy. "Now," says the chief

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[1]Quoted by Holbrook Jackson, Dreamers of Dreams, p. 30.

celebrant, "we shall get rid of the weight of dead men's thoughts." The passage brings to mind something from Hawthorne's English Notebooks: "I wish that the whole Past might be swept away, and each generation compelled to bury and destroy whatever it had produced."[1] This is a real part of Hawthorne, and of American thought; it is the impulse that pumped through Emerson and Whitman. But the story does not end there; Hawthorne's ambivalence moves him to an ironic ending. The reader is made to realize with a faint terror that the true source of oppression--the human heart--remains.

> The heart, the heart,--there was the little yet boundless sphere wherein existed the little wrong of which the crime and misery of this outward world were merely types.[2]

Like many writers of his own generation and Whitman in the next, Hawthorne was eager to bury the past. But like his later admirer, Henry James, he needed the past. He registered the need in his curiously titled Our Old Home and in his final novel, that sensitive account of an American in Italy, The Marble Faun. In his introduction to The Marble Faun he spoke regretfully of the absence of historical depth and its by-product, social complexity, in America.

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[1]Nathaniel Hawthorne, English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart (New York, 1941), p. 243.

[2]Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Earth's Holocaust," in Selected Tales and Sketches (New York, 1951), p. 372.

> No author...can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity.... Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wallflowers need ruins to make them grow.[1]

The book itself has the same message. Again the richness of the past and its closeness yield a vitalizing complexity--because they suggest to Hawthorne the transitoriness of earthly things.[2] In Rome, he tells us, he feels

> a vague sense of ponderous rememberances; a perception of such weight and density of a by-gone life...that the present moment is pressed down or crowded out, and our individual affairs and interests are but half as real here as elsewhere.[3]

The case of Melville is too complicated; one cannot insult it with a few pages of a background chapter. But we should notice in passing his escape from American society into primitive naturalism in Typee and Omoo; his attack on institutions and conventions and complacency in Pierre, a strongly anti-democratic book which paints a tragic picture of the loneliness of the rare individual prophet as he leaves the mob behind; his preoccupation with the Promethean struggle of rough men on the lonely, indefinite sea; his forty years of bitter silence, broken at last with the creation of Billy Budd, the "New Adam," who dies in compassionate sacrifice on a cross of universal human guilt; his pained and

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[1]Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Marble Faun (Boston, 1888), p. 15.

[2]Ibid., p. 179, pp. 225-226.

[3]Ibid., p. 20.

restless comment, "I feel I am an exile here."[1] Melville too was ill at ease with the American dream. With "Vesuvius for an ink-stand," he shaped his creative vision out of his own feeling of landlessness. He shares with Hawthorne the problem that Marius Bewley, in The Complex Fate, calls

> the largest problem that confronted the American artist in the nineteenth century, and which still occupies him: the nature of his separateness, and the nature of his connection with European, and particularly with English, culture.[2]

The list of American exiles and expatriates preceding James is also impressively indicative of confusion and lack of orientation. On it are found the names of Irving, Hawthorne, and Longfellow. There is the interesting young scholar (later Harvard professor) George Ticknor, who set out in 1815 with letters from Jefferson and Madison to converse with the great men of Europe--as "a mere means of preparing myself for greater usefulness and happiness after I return,--as a great sacrifice of the present to the future."[3] There are other scholars: Joseph Green Cogswell and George Bancroft; Motley and Prescott (who became historians, respectively, of Holland and Spain). Lowell, after 1851, pretty well deserted Emerson's party of Hope and

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[1]Quoted by Matthew Josephson, The Artist as American (New York, 1930), p. 1.

[2]Marius Bewley, The Complex Fate (London, 1952), pp. 2-3.

[3]George Ticknor, Life, Journals and Letters (Boston, 1877), p. 24.

soaked himself in European tradition.[1] American artists in Europe included Benjamin West, Washington Allston, William Page, William Wetmore Story (the subject of a biography by James), George Inness, James McNeil Whistler, John La Farge, and John Singer Sargent. Oliver Wendell Holmes, returning from Europe in 1886, complained that "the New World keeps the imagination on a plain and scanty diet, compared to the rich traditional and historical food which furnishes the banquets of the old world."[2]

Even Mark Twain, that most "American" of prose writers in the nineteenth century, who ridiculed the past and Europe in Connecticut Yankee and Innocents Abroad and who said that he would rather be consigned to the Puritan Heaven than be made to read James's The Bostonians,[3] was not always happy with the native westward orientation. Huck Finn's world was a world that was losing its innocence; Hadleyburg was disgustingly corruptible. Twain wrote from London in 1872, "I would a good deal rather live here."[4] In Life on the Mississippi he defended the criticisms of America made by Basil Hall, Dickens, and Harriet Martineau.

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[1] Cf. R. W. B. Lewis, American Adam, pp. 189-191.

[2] Oliver Wendell Holmes, One Hundred Days in Europe (Boston and New York, 1888), p. 200.

[3] Quoted in F. W. Dupee, The Question of Henry James (New York, 1945), p. 161.

[4] Albert Bigelow Paine, Mark Twain: A Biography (New York, 1912), II, 470.

After Matthew Arnold's reflections on America, Twain became Anglophobic again.[1] But he knew and felt the pressure of both sides of the dialogue, and his attitude shows some degree of ambivalence.

Despite all this unrest, the tradition of a distinctive American literature was growing. The journalists--far more influential than Hawthorne and Melville--hailed the frontier humorists and the regionalists and clamored for more. The kind of spread-eagle editorials on literature that Whitman wrote for the Brooklyn Eagle in the 1840's were not at all an unusual kind. Emerson was a prophet with a large following.

But if cultural orientation were not enough of a problem in itself, the American writer in the nineteenth century could wrestle with the related problem of finding a way to address his democratic audience. American society was essentially classless, but definitely middle class in taste. In America, as in Britain, art and culture were nowhere near the middle class center of life. In Britain the penny press and middle class culture in the 1830's helped catapult to fame and success such glib imitators of Southey as Robert Montgomery and Letitia E. Landon while Keats, Shelley, and the young Tennyson were being ignored.[2] In America,

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[1]Twain's wavering attitude towards England is the subject of a thesis by Howard G. Baetzhold, lodged in the library of the University of Wisconsin. See Summaries of Dissertations in the University of Wisconsin (Madison, 1951), pp. 595-597.

[2]John P. Cooke and Lionel Stevenson, English Literature of the Victorian Period (New York, 1949), p. 110.

according to the Literary History of the United States, the popular poems between 1845 and 1885 were Thomas Dunn English's "Ben Bolt," Longfellow's "Hiawatha," William Allen Butler's "Nothing to Wear," Bret Harte's "Plain Language from Truthful Jones," and Ella Wheeler Wilcox's Poems of Passion, while the field of fiction was dominated by Timothy Arthur Shay's Ten Nights in a Bar-room and What I Saw There, the sixty-odd romances by E.N.E.N. Southworth, Uncle Tom's Cabin, and the works of Fanny Fern, E. P. Roe, and Augusta Jane Evans.[1] The demand for communication between writer and reading public was a particularly intense demand in America. This was simply the consequence of living in "the New World," where a minority "class" of readers had never really existed. Irving was already conscious of the demand, and his concern with reaching the masses was regarded by Hazlitt as the main point of difference between Irving and Lamb.[2] This demand that literature be geared to the responses of the "democratic average" was an important part of the movement for American literary nationalism. Whitman spoke at great length about it. But it modified literature in two ways, not one: while it held some writers to the level of the ordinary, it cut others further adrift.

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[1]Robert E. Spiller, et al., eds., Literary History of the United States (New York, 1949), III, 218-221.

[2]William Hazlitt, Complete Works, ed. P. P. Howe (London, 1930), XI, p. 178.

Through all the glitter and the oratory of post-Civil War America and right down into the Brown Age, the Gilded Age, the age that a disenchanted Henry Adams called an age of "men and women as monstrous as the brown houses they live in," the confusion of new men and lost men is obvious. The growing force of the realistic movement gave some power to the nationalist literary tradition--but it also made the writers see the real America instead of the old romantic dream of America. To many of them, America's "fresh start" in the world had already gone sour in the East and the Midwest; for many of them, the frontier was a second chance, a last chance. Even Whitman caught some of the gloom and reflected it in his Democratic Vistas. The writers who belonged to the other side of the dialogue, on the other hand, felt more and more isolated, more and more lonely, more and more in need of depth and traditions and roots. Consider the pathetic remoteness of John La Farge, studying in Europe and returning to Boston to make stained glass windows for an age to be characterized by steam engines and skyscrapers. Artists of such temperament inevitably tended either to take on a missionary complex (as did Story, and to some extent James) or to retreat more and more from the actual world. Emily Dickinson is an interesting reflection of the age. Fearing that the people about her lived without thought and reflection (as indeed most of them did), she retreated into her own trance world to "eat evanescence slowly" with the hills, the sunsets, and a dog as large as herself for companions. Her gift could not have survived her world.

Much of the energy of a century's writers was spent, consciously or unconsciously, creatively or discursively, attempting to achieve orientation and to relate literature to the center of American experience.

CHAPTER THREE

EAST AND WEST, PALEFACE AND REDSKIN

There are some issues in the wake of this cultural tension which deserve elaboration. For by implication the problem comes to mean much more than just looking and bearing east or west. East and west have come to stand for something definite in the American mind, each locus having its list of associations. East, for example, connotes to many the historical past; West speaks of the vigorous present or of the future. The force of this connotation is part of the thesis of Fredrick W. Turner's influential The Frontier in American History; it is the spirit underlying the apocryphal Horace Greely advice, "Go West, young man, go West"; in fact, it is the geist--some might say ghost--of the yet-to-be-written but always heralded "great American Epic." To cite one line from a thousand, here is Archibald MacLeish:

> East were the
> Dead kings and the remembered sepulchres:
> West was the grass.[1]

Note that in the quotations from both MacLeish and Thoreau the westward movement is associated with the rejection of urban civilization. There is strong romantic flavor to this, and also to the "Westerner's" advocacy of nature over culture, freedom over

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[1]Archibald MacLeish, "America was Promises," in Collected Poems, 1917-1952 (Boston, 1952), p. 333.

discipline, nationalism over cosmopolitanism. Professor Ferner Nuhn, a contemporary advocate of the western stream whose The Wind Blew from the East is one of several full length studies of the cultural dichotomy, gives us this list of associations for the words East and West:

> West for work and money, back East for ease and grace. West for profanity, East for piety. West for action, East for status. West for function, East for ornament. West for democratic color, East for aristocratic form.[1]

And Professor Trilling, using Whitman and James as representatives, attempts to summarize the philosophical difference as "the difference between the moral mind, with its awareness of tragedy, irony, and multitudinous distinctions, and the transcendental mind, with its passionate sense of the oneness of multiplicity."[2]

There are other pairs of opposites which express the same antithesis: it is not just west versus east, but nature versus culture, democratic thought versus aristocratic thought, indigenous culture versus derivative culture, lowbrow versus highbrow, the "divine average" versus the unique, and so forth. Mr. Philip Rahv, in his Image and Idea, has given these two "traditions" in America names which have some currency: Redskin and Paleface. Because the interplay between these ideas has become as real and as important in other literatures as it is in American literature, the restrictiveness of Mr. Rahv's terms may be misleading. Still,

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[1]Ferner Nuhn, The Wind Blew from the East (New York, 1942), p. 14.

[2]Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination, p. 11.

the cultural problem which underlies this dissertation might be made clearer if we descend to the merely expedient, bundle all the little tensions of American culture into two handy opposites, and put Mr. Rahv's terms to work for a few pages.

It must be understood at the outset that these forces are not "schools." They are "movements" only in a vague sense. There are very few writers who adopt all of the characteristics of one or the other "movement." (The problem is familiar: Keats and Byron, for example, are in very different ways "classical" as well as "romantic.") However, if we can conceive for the moment of a "pure Paleface" and a "pure Redskin" in contemporary literature, the portraits should serve to illustrate something of the problem of orientation.

The pure Redskin would pay a great deal in tribute to Walt Whitman and insist that modern American literature must follow out the course upon which Whitman set it. The Paleface, on the other hand, would find his master in Henry James. Paradoxically, the Redskin is more likely to be a prose writer and the Paleface a poet. Katherine Anne Porter is one of the few major American prose writers who can be called a follower of James, though Europe has many, among them Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf. The Paleface poet can look back upon Poe and Emily Dickinson, but James is the real point of focus. The Redskin novelist can supplement Whitman with his own image of Mark Twain and with the early naturalistic realists.

The pure Redskin would tend to find American life entirely

sufficient for art; he would advocate and practice a popular art embodying native elements, and fight off any hint or trace of "formalism," literary exclusiveness, and so forth. The pure Paleface would have a conscious concern with form (occasionally, in his criticism especially, making a fetish of it); he would feel restricted, limited, hemmed in by American culture; running against the convention of melting everything into one mass, he would seek to express nuances, gradations, fine shades, distinctions. The Redskin would accuse the Paleface of lacking "faith," of being "altogether defeated by life"[1]--though he now has his own (essentially Redskin) Beat Generation to reckon with. The Paleface would insist that "the best art of our time is not representative; it embodies the triumph of the dedicated artist over the shortcomings of a culture."[2]

The Redskin promotes a universal democratic literature, feeding on the frontier spirit and the teeming materials of American life; the Paleface feels driven--not ideally, but necessarily for the present--to "the fragmentary world of the isolated intellectual."[3] The pure Redskin would accuse the Paleface of ignoring the social relevance of literature and the social

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[1]Philip Henderson, The Poet and Society (London, 1939), p. 182. Cf. also Van Wyck Brooks, The Confident Years.

[2]Fishman, op. cit., p. 45.

[3]Sydney Musgrove, T. S. Eliot and Walt Whitman (Wellington, N. Z., 1952), p. 18.

responsibilities of the writer (again, the Beat writers, who are an extreme, blur the distinction); the pure Paleface, on the other hand, would accuse the Redskin of sacrificing literary quality on the altar of social utility.

Neither "side" can win, for neither side, forced to the extreme of its position, can avoid bringing about the extinction of art, the Redskins killing it by default and the Palefaces by excessive devotion. But neither side exists as a recognizable whole in any case. These are forces, sides of a debate; they are not schools. Yet they are parts of a dialogue which directly or indirectly determine the shape and texture and character of modern American, and to some extent modern world, literature.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISORIENTATION IN TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

Perhaps the whole problem of the orientation of the American writer can be emphasized if we get ahead of ourselves for a moment and look at the literature which followed, came out of, and in some cases continued the nineteenth century debate.

There is a sense in which contemporary American literature has become a mature, established literature. American writers have now gained the attention of European reviewers and readers. Some of this attention, of course, is spurious or misplaced. Much of it is paid to something other than literary merit. One critic suggests that the influence of Steinbeck and Hemingway and Faulkner in Europe rests upon their singular preoccupation with violence, cruelty, the war against environment, and the theme of disintegration.[1] Undoubtedly there is some truth in this contention. But it can be balanced with the observation that American writers, by force of creative achievement, have directly influenced, stimulated, and won the respect of European writers. Andre Molitor, in 1945, was speaking this way about Faulkner, Steinbeck, and Caldwell:

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[1] Solomon Fishman, The Disinherited of Art (Los Angeles, 1953), p. 2.

> ....These men astonish us. Strong, upsetting novels written in a new manner, considering American life in a new way. We decided that certain American writers had reached the age of reflection and were recognizing a profound spiritual and moral crisis. This crisis they were expressing with an unequaled brutality, rawness, and vigor.[1]

And Gide, too, sees the value and the advantage of the American writers' limitations. Like Whitman, but also in a sense like James, he sees the Americans at the vanguard precisely because they have little past and little tradition:

> These new American authors are all, like children, drawn by the present instant, by the now, far from books, exempt from the ratiocinations, from the preoccupations, from the remorse which dull our old world; and that is why going to them can be for us very profitable, for us who can be weighed down by too rich a past.[2]

Still, accepting the prominence and the worth of contemporary American literature, does not something seem wrong? American writers have achieved, with artistic force and power, considerable insight into the "spiritual crisis." Indeed, the crisis is forced and intensified by the absence of direction in American culture. There are few roots; there is little orientation. So the literature becomes daring and experimental (note the almost desperate feeling behind the innovations of Ezra Pound, Hemingway, Tom Wolfe, Allen Ginsberg)--but it also becomes an essentially negative literature, a literature of protest.

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[1]Thelma M. Smith and Ward L. Miner, Transatlantic Migration (Durham, N.C., 1955), p. 18.

[2]Ibid., p. 22.

Of course, the nationalist tradition of indigenous literature goes on. Occasional writers in the twentieth century still keep intact Whitman's vision of a new man in a new culture. The critical position appropriate to Whitman is strongly present in the many disciples of Parrington, for example, who is praised by Stanley Edgar Hyman for creating "the first rounded progressive-democratic-social tradition for American writers to match the reactionary-aristocratic-religious tradition of Eliot, Ransom, Winters, et al."[1] But except among the critics much of Whitman's simplicity and optimistic faith have disappeared. It is no longer current as a creative vision. The writers who limit themselves to Whitman's Law for American themes and materials find plenty to write about, but little to celebrate. Much of his exuberance and his passion for the new, free individual has run aground in America; ironically, Whitman too was sowing the seeds of expatriatism. Witness Henry Miller, expatriate, who worships Whitman at every turn, but prefers France to America because "one likes to piss in sunlight, among human beings who watch and smile down at you."[2]

Of greater interest in contemporary American literature is the confusion and disorientation among writers who fail to hold on

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[1]Stanley Edgar Hyman, The Armed Vision (New York, 1948), p. 95.

[2]The Henry Miller Reader, edited by Laurence Durell (Norfolk, Conn., 1959), p. 21.

to Whitman's (and for that matter Emerson's and Thoreau's) transcendentalist vision of a new society, a society marked by its separateness and its innocence.

In the early 1900's Garland and Frank Norris and the Muckrakers stayed close to American life but repudiated most of what they found. Ever since, from a variety of causes, disenchantment has increased. Trumbull Stickney, who with William Vaughan Moody and George Cabot Lodge form the interesting transitional group known as "the Harvard poets," is far too interesting to ignore. Stickney, an instructor in Greek at Harvard, was cut off by an early death; but his slender volumes of poems deserve more attention than they get, not only for their experimentation with imagism but also for their vision. In the early stanzas of Prometheus Pyrphoros (1900)[1] we can sense the pessimism, along with its indebtedness to Henry Adams's thermodynamic approach to history.

> How dark it is, how dark and miserable! ...
>
> Here we lie
> All hedged in with hoar and darkness, old
> For staring on the sodden vacancy....

Prometheus is far afield from Emerson's "party of Hope" or Whitman's "athletic American themes":

> Sometimes down my dark bewildered brain
> Stumble fantastic hopes that--like the birds
> I've found afield dismembered and undone,
> Like beasts that shut their swimming eyes, and leaves
> That eddy dizzily down the nervous wind--

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[1] Poems of Trumbull Stickney (Boston, 1905), pp. 22-25.

So may we fail and fall, be swept away
From what we are.

In this poem of Stickney's the despair fades; Prometheus re-steals the light, bringing "such dawn as ne'er before tore the wide sky." But man does not simply start in freedom and innocence, as in Whitman, and he must pay a price. Stickney has Prometheus go to

hang out in anguish crucified
Upon the giddy ramparts of the world.

And if Prometheus can call upon man to will the future, he is not very convincing. Stickney's faith in progress is a fainter, weaker faith than we usually find in nineteenth century America. It is significant that Stickney finally went to oriental thought for succor, as had Lafcadio Hearne before him.

Stickney and Lodge are, indeed, transitional. It requires no great straining to see them as precursors of Pound, Hulme, and Eliot. The same disquiet can be seen in the work of Edwin Arlington Robinson, a better-known poet of the same generation. Robinson simultaneously hated the dependence of American culture upon European culture and found little hope for American culture. He finally won through to a conviction of the maturity of America in "White Lights"--but for him, significantly, the great figures in American literature were Hawthorne and James.

By the 1920's alienation and disenchantment were in full bloom. The war had something to do with it, surely, but the mood was coming anyway. In 1913, a year before the war, Ambrose Bierce, silent for twenty years, disappeared across the Mexican border with a horse and a revolver, explaining by letter to a

friend just as a Hemingway hero might explain, "It is better than dying in bed, or falling down the cellar stairs."[1] Bierce's two young disciples, who, he thought, were to be his real gift to posterity, both learned their lessons too well from the master; with unrelieved Biercean irony, they both committed suicide in the early twenties. Emerson's vision of free-singing democratic bards was interrupted by a nightmare: the writers of the Lost Generation, living in exile in Europe: Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, T. S. Eliot, E. E. Cummings, Henry Miller, Eliot Paul, Harold Stearns, Kay Boyle. If most of the writers stayed at home, many of them did not feel at home: Witness F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eugene O'Neill, Ring Lardner, H. L. Mencken, Katherine Anne Porter; Thomas Wolfe's early work also falls into the hostile mood of this period. There were more poets like Robinson Jeffers, repudiating, than there were poets like Sandburg and MacLeish, affirming. Even Robert Frost's first books--undoubtedly his best books--were written and published in exile. Revolt was the order of the day. Mr. Pound's Patria Mia may exaggerate the case of the writer against American civilization, but the feeling, in some form, was generally there; we cannot always dismiss it so easily as Mr. Pound's critics have dismissed him. Something was wrong, something intrinsic in American culture; for, as Pound observed, when something is wrong

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[1]Quoted by Matthew Josephson, Portrait of the Artist as an American (New York, 1930), p. 180.

with the arts, it is wrong with more than the arts. The main literary weight in the twenties, one commentator summarizes, was in the direction of "dislocation and impasse, as though the soul of the American writer was moving one way and the soul of the country another."[1]

In the thirties and forties some writers began returning from exile. Thomas Wolfe and Scott Fitzgerald made their unsteady peace with America before dying, and others returned--though Stein, Miller, Pound, Eliot, and Hemingway did not. Harte Crane, the best of Whitman's avowed disciples, caught the old feeling of hope and expansiveness in The Bridge (1930), but leaped to his death three years later. James T. Farrell, Faulkner, Arthur Miller, and Carson McCullers emerged, stayed at home, and turned their probing lights on American society. But something was still wrong. The feeling of being lost and alienated did not disappear, nor has it during or after the war.

The critics, too, have been sensitive to the alienation and the lack of orientation in twentieth century American literature. T. K. Whipple, in his Spokesmen (1928), had this to say about Dreiser:

> He has suffered from the absence of an established national literary tradition, with its attendant discipline in taste and critical standards.[2]

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[1]Leo Gurko, Heroes, Highbrows, and the Popular Mind (Indianapolis, 1953), p. 78.

[2]T. K. Whipple, Spokesmen (New York, 1928), p. 90.

And here is Whipple, in the same vein, on Eugene O'Neill:

> If O'Neill's dramatic world is narrow and meager, his characterization incomplete, if his imagination is not hale and robust, it is because that imagination, feeding upon a devitalized life inimical to human values, has suffered from undernourishment.[1]

While Parrington was protesting the devitalization of American purity by European orientation, Babbitt and More were pointing out the deficiencies of an indigenous American culture. They were echoed by Norman Foerster's Humanism and America:

> It is doubtful whether a real American culture could ever spring from our own experience; it is certain that it could be caused to spring from our own experience by a happy use of foreign culture.[2]

The same approach is taken by Mortimer Adler and Robert Maynard Hutchins; their "Great Books" program is a manifestation of it.

The critics and writers of twentieth century America still live in a society which (as Tocqueville predicted of it in the 1830's) is in many ways hostile to the arts. Popular American media reflect the hostility daily: look at Jiggs and Maggie or at Moon Mullins on the comic page of the daily papers and you see the manly pride in flaunting civilization. Huntington Cairns could complain in 1948 that "we are confronted with the apparent fact that not a single composer is able to subsist by his serious work."[3] The artist is pushed aside with the intellectual, the

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[1]Whipple, Spokesmen, p. 250.

[2]Quoted by Daniel Boorstin, America and the Image of Europe (New York, 1960), p. 30.

[3]Quoted by Gurko, op. cit., p. 80.

intellectual celebrated in a snatch of song from the film On the Avenue (something that haunts the jangled memory and is unworthy of a footnote):

> He attracted some attention
> When he found the fourth dimension.
> But he ain't got rhythm,
> No one's with him,
> He's the loneliest man in town.

Some of this hostility is clearly the by-product of democracy, and can be found in varying degrees throughout the Western world.[1] But some of it is also distinctly American--it shows up in the satires and parodies that Europeans write of Americans--and is the by-product of the party of Hope, the Redskin tradition, the distinctive half of the debate about American culture. It sends many artists, especially those who protest the limitations and reject the vision of a "distinctively American art," into eccentricity, or into exile, or into tedious public defense of themselves.

For many of them no longer feel or have never felt that America is separate and distinctive. Many of them feel that this phase of American culture, like the same phase of American political thought, has passed. Professor Boorstin, in his most

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[1] Cf., for example, Eric Bentley: "Has the artist been at home under democracy? ...One should think not only of the celebrated critics of democracy, Carlyle, Nietzsche, Wagner, Shaw... but of all the homeless aesthetes and Bohemians driven to pessimism or revolt by the nineteenth century system. Name the great writers of our time: Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, James Joyce, Rainer Maria Rilke, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot...." (The Cult of the Superman, p. xvi.)

recent book, states discursively from the historian's point of view what many American writers witness with their work. "Since about 1900," Professor Boorstin writes,

> we have begun to discover that in many unsuspected ways we might be like the world and might be involved with the world. This declining sense of American uniqueness is the great trauma of the American mind in the last half-century. It has stirred our dissatisfaction with ourselves by shattering our traditional self-image. It has deprived us of our orientation toward the world.[1]

So the sense of direction in American culture is still not clear. The debate that runs through the nineteenth century still carries on. A good deal of American literature comes from one side, or the other, or the complex interplay between them. The literature is marked by confusion, uncertainty, and various kinds of alienation. "The greatest fact about our modern American writing," says Alfred Kazin,

> is the writers' absorption in every last detail of their American world together with their deep and subtle alienation from it. There is a terrible estrangement in this writing....[2]

The spread-eagle critic bent on claiming the maturity of American literature (on the basis of its distinctiveness, of course) must do a great deal of scurrying about, keeping the rattling skeletons concealed in their literary closets. Meanwhile, the old questions about the past, Europe, democratic art, human guilt or human

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[1] America and the Image of Europe, p. 121.

[2] Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (New York, 1942), p. 16.

innocence, become more important to an understanding of contemporary Western literature.

We must go back to the nineteenth century and see the problem in detail.

PART TWO:

British Estimates Before 1856:
The Prospects for an American Literature

CHAPTER FIVE

GENERAL VIEWS OF AMERICAN CULTURE, 1790-1840

Almost without exception, American writers in the nineteenth century were aware of the difficulties and the awkwardness involved in being American writers. But these difficulties were discussed much more bluntly by British observers and writers. The discussion centered about mass standards for the writer and the dull, rootless newness of American life, but it also took into account commercialism, the materialistic temper of American society, and the American attitude towards the past and towards Europe--topics which became explosively relevant in the era of Whitman and James.

I.

In reading the early British commentaries on American culture it is necessary to separate the wheat of intelligent criticism from the chaff of political bombast, vain self-indulgence, investment speculation, and tourist haughtiness. The bulk of the reading has to be in "travel books," for which there was a ready market of hungrily curious readers. Probably no one has taken the trouble to total up the number of such books, but the Edinburgh Review published reviews of forty-four of them before 1860. This fact, coupled with the fact of the popularity of these books, should be enough to discourage the most painstaking

scholar. But these books have been studied by Alan Nevins, William B. Cairns, Jane Mesick, Clarence Gohdes, J. G. Brooks, Paul M. Wheeler, Robert Heilman, and probably a score of doctoral candidates. Still, they are disappointing books.

In some cases the books merely further perpetrated an ignorance about America which was already rampant. By contrast to these travelers' accounts, Goldsmith's wildly exaggerated account of the tropical climate and Campbell's mention of tropical flowers in Wyoming[1] are minor misunderstandings. In other cases political advantage seems to have been served by distortion of fact. The French commentators De Gasparin and Tocqueville and Beaumont show, by contrast, an unaccountable degree of candor, urbanity, and intelligence. There is undoubtedly some truth to the contention of Henry Tuckerman, an American, who charged in 1864 that there was indeed a good market in England for travel books on the United States, but that publishers preferred and sometimes prescribed books that ridiculed America. An English friend of Tuckerman's was commissioned by a London publisher to write a book; "the argument of the book was to demonstrate the inevitable depreciation of mind, manners, and enjoyment under the influence of democratic institutions."[2] However this may be, a few of the books are worth mentioning.

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[1]Cited, along with other misunderstandings, by Henry T. Tuckerman, America and her Commentators (New York, 1864), pp. 273-4.

[2]Ibid., p. 260.

Before steam navigation (1825), most travelers--Henry Fearon, William Cobbett, Francis Hall, Henry Wansey, and Isaac Weld are the most reliable--were middle class businessmen who had come from an England burdened with war debts. Their mission was utilitarian; their observations of American culture and literature were either non-existent or merely trite.[1]

English fiction dealing with America and American subjects in the first twenty years of the new republic's life is likewise of little value or relevance.[2]

If steam navigation increased the quantity and variety, it did not noticeably alter the quality of British books on America. From 1825 to 1840, the tourist army was largely Tory in sentiment, its members apparently bent on collecting materials, factual or otherwise, with which to illustrate pre-conceived arguments against the social revolution which was threatening the peace at home.[3] One Reverend Isaac Fidler, a Tory Anglican vicar, was ruffled into writing a book of ridiculous pomposity; Mrs. Trollope and Basil Hall wrote violently, using sweeping generalizations; Captain Marryat, the geologist Lyell, and Captain Thomas Hamilton were less violent--but no more careful. Harriet Martineau's

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[1]Cf. Alan Nevins, American Social History as Recorded by British Travellers (New York, 1931), pp. 10-26.

[2]Robert B. Heilman, America in English Fiction, 1760-1800 (Baton Rouge: Univ. of Louisiana Press, 1937), pp. 423-430.

[3]Nevins, op. cit., pp. 111-138.

three-volume Society in America shows deeper analysis and (incidentally) a favorable disposition: but it does not discuss the possibilities of literature and the arts in America. Dickens, in American Notes and in Martin Chuzzlewit, showed a natural interest in this question. But he was a descriptive writer rather than an analytical writer; his preoccupation with courts and prisons in American Notes and with comic creation in Martin Chuzzlewit left room for only dabs and touches of analysis, none of them outstandingly perceptive. Fairly often, especially in American Notes, he put aside comic caricature and talked seriously about truth and beauty, saying essentially what Poe had said about "the human aspiration for Supernatural Beauty":[1]

> It would be well...for the American people as a whole, if they loved the real less, and the Ideal somewhat more....if there were a wider cultivation of what is beautiful, without being eminently and directly useful.[2]

Such passages, along with the more typical tirades against American journalism and Mark Tapley's shrewd observations of inflated artificiality, might be taken to indicate Dickens's general failure to find hope for an American literature. They must be balanced, however, with less-frequent expressions of hope, as in Dickens's comment on Harvard's leavening influence upon Boston

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[1]Edgar Allen Poe, The Poetic Principle (Paris: Editions du Myrte, 1945), p. 92.

[2]Charles Dickens, American Notes (London: Chapman and Hall, 1895), pp. 196-197.

society, where "the almighty dollar sinks into something comparatively insignificant, amidst a whole pantheon of better gods."[1] It might be noted in passing that such comments on the Ideal, beauty, and Harvard from a writer who is a "slum realist" must have been only confusing to Americans in the nineteenth century. Dickens had no partisan feeling for the dichotomy in American culture.

II.

The writers who stayed in Britain, undistracted by American ice-houses, spittoons, and rocking chairs, caught the essence of the question of American literature more consistently. The very possibility of an American literature was immediately called into question. That no real literature existed up to 1820 seemed perfectly obvious. Blackwood's, in 1819, assured the readers that "if the whole stock of their literature were set on fire tomorrow, no scholar would feel the loss." As to the arts in general, "America is just about where she was when discovered by Columbus."[2] "Who," asked Sydney Smith, "in the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? Or goes to an American play? Or looks at an American picture or statue?"[3] Unfortunately, the ensuing

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[1]Dickens, American Notes, p. 25.

[2]Blackwood's Magazine, IV (Feb., 1819), 546.

[3]Edinburgh Review, XXXIII (Jan., 1820), 79.

discussion was carried on without much reference to actual American books--this because most American literature published in Britain appeared in the form of cheap reprints of the kind never reviewed in the periodicals.[1] But the attitude that there was no American literature and could be no American literature was in strong predominance in most of the periodicals, Tory, Liberal, or Radical, until the middle of the century.

For one thing, the critics of this period thought it significant that America was strictly a mercantile society. She was governed, in Carlyle's phrase, by the Cash-nexus. Her speech, her manners, her values were all molded in part by the standards of commerce. This made life dull, devoid of range and interest. It seemed scarcely possible that great literature could grow out of such barrenness. Literature, the Athenaeum observed, requires the habit of reflection.[2] "We have had poets from the loom and the plow," commented William Roscoe, "but none from the counter."[3] "There is nothing," said Blackwood's, "to awaken fancy in that land of dull realities."[4]

It was generally assumed by these critics that writers needed

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[1]Clarence Gohdes, American Literature in Nineteenth Century England (New York, 1944), pp. 18 ff.

[2]Athenaeum, III (Feb. 11, 1829), 84.

[3]William Roscoe, ed., Specimens of the American Poets (London, 1822), p. 4.

[4]Blackwood's, loc. cit.

an historical past upon which to reflect. But this too was missing in America. There could be but few reminders of past ages. Hazlitt regarded this fact as explanation for his comments on American literature up to 1826. He meant, in other words, that imagination had to feed on history.

> The fault of American literature (when not a mere vapid imitation of ours) was, that it ran too much into dry, minute, literal description....They had no natural imagination....[1]

Another writer found the American difficulty to lie in the fact that "Her poets must be inspired by Hope rather than by Memory, who was held of old to be the Mother of Muses."[2] They have, says another,

> Neither history, nor romance, nor poetry, nor legends, on which to exercise their genius, and kindle their imagination. In truth there is no room amongst them for such men as an Alfred, a Chaucer, a Spencer /sic/, a Bacon, a Newton, or a Locke.... /T/here cannot possibly be such men in America; ...the peculiar circumstances of society, which give charms to our early poets, can never be experienced there....[3]

Such comments were typical. William Roscoe, in an excellently perceptive preface to his 1822 edition of Specimens of the American Poets, saw the relationship of this whole problem to the larger problem of literary tradition--and incidentally defined the question which was to haunt American writers for the

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[1]William Hazlitt, Works, VI, 385.

[2]Blackwood's, XXXI (April, 1832), 646.

[3]The British Critic, X (Nov., 1818), 491.

following eighty years:

> The anomalous situation of America has placed her in a dilemma. She must either read, admire, and imitate our English writers, and thus probably remain for ages without a distinctive and national literature of her own, or she must abandon and abjure those foreign models, and thus run no inconsiderable risk of acquiring a rude and degenerate taste. The latter alternative is...the theory of the Americans, especially of their poets.[1]

Critics also charged America with intellectual immaturity. The limitations of knowledge in America, they argued, were severe enough to make American literature either impossible[2] or totally dependent.[3]

But of much greater importance is the attempt to evaluate American literary potential by reference to the structure of American society. The rigidly partisan journals were, of course, deeply involved in this sort of criticism. The Tory case was stated simply and sharply in the Athenaeum:

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[1]Roscoe, op. cit., p. 5. Roscoe's final sentence is more prophetic than it is empirically accurate. George S. Gordon (Anglo-American Literary Relations, p. 100) sets 1837--the year of Emerson's oration at Harvard on the American Scholar--as the key date in the movement for "liberation" of American letters. The fact that the Democratic Review was founded in the same year for the purpose of developing a distinctively American and democratic literature adds support. (Cf. Stafford, Literary Criticism of "Young America" ..., pp. 56-60). The only noteworthy groundbreaker before 1837 was Channing's article in the Christian Examiner on "The Importance and Means of a National Literature," which appeared in 1830.

[2]Blackwood's, IV (Feb., 1819), 546.

[3]Critical Review (5th series), V (Jan., 1817), 91.

> We do not believe that America has a literature; we do not see that it has the germs of one; we do not believe that it can have one until its institutions are fundamentally changed.[1]

Nine years earlier, the Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany had elaborated the same theme: American institutions are hostile to the development of literature.

> In common, we believe, with many of our countrymen, we did believe that there was something in the constitution of American society unfavourable to the development of literary genius, that the form of their government presented an insuperable barrier to the formation of a standard of taste among themselves....[2]

What is missing, of course, is the discipline and refinement which is born of aristocracy; "the establishment of an aristocracy...(is) indispensable to a national literature." What is also missing is that greatest possession of an aristocracy, leisure. For ages to come, America, "busied in...cultivating her waste lands, would no more think of manufacturing her own literature than her own hardware."[3]

The problem of public taste in a democracy stands out clearly in these early reviews, usually as a further extension of the problem of having no traditional "standards of taste." The comments on America's early "democratic poets" revive something of the flavor: while Bryant, for example, was given the dubious

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[1] Athenaeum, II (Oct., 1829), 637.

[2] Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany, VII (Dec., 1820), 543.

[3] Ibid.

honor of being praised by the Penny Magazine for being "simple and intelligible enough for the common reader,"[1] Longfellow's common simplicity (the source of tremendous popularity in Britain) was subjected to numerous parodies, among them one in Punch which concluded in meager puns, "If you call such ink-Standish stuff poetry, Punch will soon reel you off Miles."[2] Even the liberal London Magazine, in language which Americans could only characterize as Tory, warned of the difficulties ahead for a literature which must grow in the atmosphere of social equality. Americans are headed for trouble because they "do not tolerate the privileges of birth or readily sanction those of genius. A very little excess above the water-mark of mediocrity is with them quite enough."[3] In a similar manner the Edinburgh Review, going slightly beyond the question of popular taste and into the question of free opinion, suggested the problem which Tocqueville, six years later, was to call the problem of "the tyranny of the majority":

> And here we will state a suspicion, into which we have been led by more than one American writer, that the establishment of civil and religious liberty is not quite so favorable to the independent formulation, and free circulation of opinion, as might be expected.[4]

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[1]Penny Magazine, I (June 30, 1832), 134-135.

[2]Walter H. Hamilton, ed., Parodies of the Works of English and American Authors (London: Reeves and Turner, 1884-1889), I, 80.

[3]London Magazine, II (Sept., 1820), 147.

[4]Edinburgh Review, I (Oct., 1829), 125.

Bishop Berkeley had said that the course of empire was moving westward and that "Time's noblest offspring is the last." Shelley, in "The Revolt of Islam," saw America as "an epitaph of glory for the tomb of murdered Europe." There was speculation about a pantisocracy in the American wilderness. But before 1840 there were almost no critics or reviewers who shared the vision of the poets.

CHAPTER SIX

TOCQUEVILLE AND AFTER

The British and the Americans are, as Bernard Shaw observed, hopelessly separated by the barrier of a common language. It was probably inevitable that the first classic work[1] on American society should be done by a Frenchman. Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America gave to European commentary on America the depth and clarity and seriousness and perspective that it had lacked. In spite of the fact that in 21 chapters on American Literature Tocqueville does not name a single author or book, it also contributed much to the discussion of America's literary potential. Even in Britain the book marked a turning point. Hence, although it might appear a digression, we must consider briefly Tocqueville's reflections upon literature in a democratic society. This can best be done by briefly summarizing his position and indicating the contemporaneous British reaction to it.

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[1]Tocqueville's supremacy is generally recognized. The German philosopher Dilthey calls him "undoubtedly the most illustrious of all political analysts since Aristotle and Machiavelli." (Quoted by J. P. Mayer, Prophet of the Mass Age: A Study of Alexis De Tocqueville [London, 1939], p. xiv.) Sir Herbert Read calls Democracy in America "a work of universal significance, ranking to my mind with Plato's Republic and Laws." ("De Tocqueville on Art in America," Adelphi, XXIII [Oct.-Dec., 1946], 9.)

I.

Tocqueville's entire study is organized around what he called "the equality of conditions," "the fundamental fact from which all others seem to be derived."[1] This great principle has much to recommend it; but it also raises many serious problems. The disappearance of the aristocratic class, whatever its advantages, could easily mean the disappearance of superior intellect, for "the greater or the lesser possibility of subsisting without labor is...the necessary boundary of intellectual improvement."[2] The attempt to level all men is contrary to nature, for

> although the capacities of men are widely different, as the creator has doubtless intended they should be, they are submitted to the same method of treatment.[3]

Such a condition is necessarily reflected in literature and in the fine arts. Tocqueville reminded his readers that

> America has hitherto produced very few writers of distinction; she possesses no great historians, and not a single eminent poet. The inhabitants of that country look upon...literary pursuits with disapprobation; and there are towns of very second-rate importance in Europe in which more literary works are annually published than in the twenty-four states of the union put together.[4]

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[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, edited by Henry Steele Commager (London, 1948), p. 1.

[2] Ibid., p. 186.

[3] Ibid., p. 48.

[4] Ibid., pp. 240-241.

He was careful to make clear that America's indifference to art was not a product of democracy and its institutions or of equality merely; there were other causes which had to be kept separate; he did not wish to confuse what was democratic with what was only American. He insisted on isolating such peculiarly American factors as (1) the dominance of commerce over American life; (2) the puritan background, with its hostility to art and literature; (3) the distraction of the mind towards the easy adventure of seeking great potential wealth; and (4) the possibility of relying upon Great Britain to fill the needs of cultural life and the life of the intellect.[1] These factors, having nothing to do with democracy, all tend to turn the attention of America towards things, towards the material world.[2] There is, of course, some overlapping with essentially democratic factors: points (1) and (3), for example, are let loose and intensified in American society by the absence of rigid classes and by the equality of conditions. Tocqueville saw this link between democracy on the one hand and the materialism which derives from commerce on the other. Hence it is no contradiction for him to say, in another part of the book, that "democracy (not Americanism) not only infuses a taste for letters among the trading classes, but introduces a trading spirit into literature."[3]

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[1]Tocqueville, Democracy in America, pp. 156-157, 312-314.

[2]Ibid., p. 314. [3]Ibid., p. 332.

Democracy and its institutions, Tocqueville attempted to show, have a very marked influence upon literature and the fine arts. The intellect must be employed, not to gratify the mind and spirit as in aristocratic ages, but to gratify the body.[1] Democratic nations "will habitually prefer the useful to the beautiful, and they will require that the beautiful should be useful."[2] Art, no longer slanted towards a single class, will have a wider market--but it will also have fewer opulent and fastidious consumers to demand high standards of excellence.[3] Materialism in art is a necessary outcome:

> The social conditions and institutions of democracy impart, moreover, certain peculiar tendencies to all the imitative arts.... They frequently withdraw them from the delineation of the soul to fix them exclusively on that of the body: and they substitute the representation of motion and sensation for that of sentiment and thought: in a word, they put the Real in the place of the Ideal.[4]

This preoccupation with the physical world, Tocqueville thought, hindered and limited the possibilities of poetry. The imagination does not become extinct; but it transfers its attention to the useful and the actual.[5] The principle of equality actually "diminishes the number of objects to be described."[6] Tocqueville found three reasons for this limitation of the poet's material. First of all, the principle of equality aids the breakdown of

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[1]Tocqueville, Democracy in America, p. 318.

[2]Ibid., p. 320. [3]Ibid., p. 324. [4]Ibid., p. 325.

[5]Ibid., p. 341. [6]Ibid., p. 342.

religious discipline. In the scattering of belief, scepticism "draws the imagination of the poets back to earth," or, at best, religious belief is simplified to a belief in one vague Supreme Power, and loses touch with secondary agents. Secondly, democracy and equality create a natural depreciation of the past so that it too must be out of bounds for the poet. Finally, even the present itself is of limited use to the poet: his concern must be with the leveled average, not with the universal or ideal in man.[1]

But it would be misleading if we left the matter here, implying that Tocqueville saw no hope for a literature which rises out of a society based upon the principle of equality. That he was pessimistic--not about democracy, but about democratic art--is a matter of fact; but he saw some different kind of literature emerging, a literature which could penetrate quite deeply into unexplored phenomena.

> The principle of equality does not...destroy all the subjects of poetry: it renders them less numerous, but more vast.[2]

The principle of equality, "in proportion as it has established itself in the world, has dried up most of the old springs of poetry";[3] but there is presumably the chance that new springs will be found.

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[1]Tocqueville, Democracy in America,

[2]Ibid., p. 346. [3]Ibid., p. 342.

The "tyranny of the majority" was also a central theme in Tocqueville's analysis of America's literary soil. He saw the tremendous power of public opinion--"...religion herself holds her sway there, much less as a doctrine of revelation than as a commonly received opinion"[1]--and feared its effect upon literature. It was not merely the distinction between popularity and literary quality, and its effects upon various writers' rewards, that troubled him; he thought the creative process itself was endangered because writers would be forced to conform their opinions to those of the majority. He found that, just because majority rule was worshipped, the expression of unpopular opinion was bitterly resented in America more than anywhere in the world. America, said Tocqueville, has no great writers because "literary genius cannot exist without liberty of thought, and there is no liberty of thought in America."[2]

So much for general analysis. It is more interesting to see Tocqueville go to work as a prophet of the American literature of the future. He complained that there was no real American literature;[3] but he was certain that America would ultimately have a literature of her own, of different and predictable character. It would be an unconventional, perhaps even lawless literature because this is the natural outcome of a society which is

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[1]Tocqueville, Democracy in America, p. 298.

[2]Ibid., p. 195. [3]Ibid., pp. 328-329.

fragmented, atomistic, lacking in community.[1] Literary form will "ordinarily be slighted, sometimes despised."[2] The "more delicate beauties" of literature will be considered to be simply "a transient and necessary recreation amid the serious labours of life."[3]

Literature will, of course, have to conform to the demands of readers. There will be tremendous pressure for books which are quickly read and easily understood, emphasizing the unexpected, interesting enough to break the monotony of practical life, dealing in "rapid emotions, startling passages." The object of writers will be "to astonish rather than to please, and to stir the passions more than to charm the taste."[4] The restriction of the democratic poet to the leveled average, the common, the ordinary will force him to go below the surface of appearance "in order to read the inner soul."[5] Thus Tocqueville predicted--accurately, if one looks only at the main stream of American literature--a literature which is experimental, unconventional, impatient to achieve effect, realistic, and psychological in method.

Because democratic literature will be "naturally deficient" in craftsmanship and in a sense of the ideal, American writers will have to study carefully the literature of the ancients. The

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[1]Tocqueville, Democracy in America, pp. 329-330.

[2]Ibid., p. 331. [3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., [5]Ibid., pp. 345-346.

value of such a study would lie in the fact that classical literature would simply set democratic literature in relief; the peculiar democratic literary qualities will "spring up of their own accord." Interestingly, Tocqueville anticipates the objection of the Whitman school to any contact with classical culture; but he insists that such study may be useful to the literature of a people "without being appropriate to its social and political wants." There is, of course, some small danger that men will "perturb the state, in the name of the Greeks and Romans, instead of enriching it." But this cannot occur so long as literary study is not exclusively limited to the classics.[1]

From one point of view at least, Tocqueville thought that literature, the arts, and scientific activity stood to gain from democracy. The middle classes, accumulating wealth and possessing the freedom to expand wherever they wish, will individually attempt from natural inclination to better the mind and the human spirit. This cultural energy will filter down even further into society, for all men will realize that in a society based upon equality it is mind that makes the difference, and makes wealth and social status possible.[2]

Though summary cannot do such a book justice, it is obvious that Tocqueville, with greater candor than any of his predecessors,

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[1]Tocqueville, Democracy in America, p. 333.

[2]Ibid., pp. 314-316.

caught a glimpse of the real problem of American literature. He was not (as he is sometimes imagined) a mere aristocratic heckler of American literature. He saw both sides of the dialogue that was forming, and in some respects he saw great promise for American literature. At times his French background tempted him into making too easy an identification of the aristocratic with the classical and the democratic with the romantic; but the oversimplification is almost appropriate if we savor again the romantic flavor of the American nationalist ideology.

Charles Cestre[1] is right in noting, as Edward Dowden[2] noted many years earlier, that Tocqueville gave an accurate forecast of Whitman. It is well to remember that he did not do so in consistently disparaging tones, even though he was at the same time exploring the difficulties and deficiencies of a literature cut off from the nourishing sources that had fed the literature of Western civilization for centuries.

II.

Tocqueville's work was welcomed in Britain with unusual enthusiasm, both by readers and by the great reviews. John Stuart Mill, reviewing the second half of the work when it appeared in

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[1]Charles Cestre, "Alexis de Tocqueville, Temoin et juge de la civilization Americaine," Revue des Cours et Conferences, XXXV (Jan. 15, 1934), 281-287.

[2]Edward Dowden, Studies in Literature (London, 1878), 468-521.

1840, spoke of its "easy triumph...over the indifference of our at once busy and indolent public...."[1] Much of this may have been due to Sir Robert Peel's public recommendation of the book, duly printed as advertisement by the publishers,[2] which (as Mill observed) misled many country gentlemen into believing that the book was a definitive demolition of democracy, but which still achieved great good,

> since the result is, that the English public now know and read the first philosophical book ever written on Democracy, as it manifests itself in modern society.[3]

Most of the reviews--Edinburgh, Westminster, Blackwood's, Quarterly, Tait's, British and Foreign, Eclectic, London, and North British among them--gave considerable space to the work; but, because it appeared in one of the stormiest decades in the nineteenth century, the concern is almost exclusively political--and partisan to boot. Valuable as some of these reviews are--Mill's forty-seven pages in the Edinburgh Review and the two long articles in the British and Foreign Review are especially outstanding--they seem to indicate no awareness of the fact that

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[1] Edinburgh Review, LXXII (Oct., 1840), 1.

[2] Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, VII (new series) (Aug., 1840), p. 2: "Let me earnestly advise your perusal of M. de Tocqueville's work; his testimony, as well from actual experience as on account of freedom from prejudice, is above suspicion." Mill (op. cit., p. 2) reports that the Tories immediately made phrases like "the tyranny of the majority" part of their stock, but failed to understand the work as a whole.

[3] Edinburgh Review, op. cit., p. 2.

something of major importance has been contributed to the discussion of American literature.[1] Mill, whom Tocqueville's biographer calls one of the very few men who understood Tocqueville,[2] did find this facet of the book worthy of comment. Mill objected that Tocqueville had not clearly distinguished "democratic" forces from "commercial, middle-class" forces; for Mill it was really the latter which threatened human culture. But, he went on, the rule of the middle classes can be trusted if society strengthens as a counter "an agricultural class, a leisured class, and a learned class."[3] Aside from this, Mill and Tocqueville agree. Democracy per se, wrote Mill, is not fatal to literature; art will flourish in a democratic society; but its quality will decline, and literature will become a trade. "There will thus be an immense mass of third and fourth-rate productions, and very few first-rate."[4]

Blackwood's reviewer, also reviewing the second half of Democracy in America in 1840, registered a very different reaction. He found in Tocqueville only gloomy warnings about the destruction of art, and objected to them. "We entertain no such

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[1]This is due in part to the fact that the two volumes of the work were published separately. The first volume was given most of the attention, but it is in the second volume that Tocqueville deals with American cultural and intellectual life.

[2]J. P. Mayer, op. cit., p. 150.

[3]Edinburgh Review, op. cit., p. 45.

[4]Op. cit., pp. 26-27.

terrible vision of the future as that which haunts M. de Tocqueville.... In all his views it is evident 'fear shakes the pencil, fancy loves excess.'"[1] The reviewer did not think that changes in social structure would bring about changes in poetry.

> Such a change in the character of poetry, as M. de Tocqueville supposes will come about, appears to us quite impossible, unless a correspondent change, not in governments, not in society, but in human nature itself, takes place at the same time.[2]

For the source of inspiration for poetry, the reviewer argued, is simply nature. There are no other sources. The absence of a past in America does not seem to him a problem at all because it is inconceivable to him that man could lose his "natural" fascination for the past. If a society did lose it, they would have not a different poetry, but no poetry at all. The very idea of a body of poetry out of touch with the past seemed to Blackwood's "preposterous."[3]

Although other reviewers and critics had little to say about Tocqueville's observations on America's literary potential, his book became an important factor in British criticism after 1840. Most intelligent critics were compelled to reckon with him, to work in terms of his book. Democracy in America became a pivot, a point of reference, a springboard. It became this for the two major British critics to follow Tocqueville, Lord Bryce and

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[1] Blackwood's Magazine, XLVIII (Oct., 1840), 472.

[2] Ibid., p. 471. [3] Ibid., p. 472.

Matthew Arnold; it also became this, but less directly, for most of their fellow commentators.

III.

After 1840, the ranks of popular travel-books continued to swell and the reviews continued their partisan volleying; but as America grew, survived a war, opened her western territories, and increased her claims to civilization while the continent was seething in revolution and Britain was adapting herself to radical social changes, serious interest in the new world increased. British writers of all political factions began to look more intensely at the progress (or regress) of the great social experiment. America was becoming significant; publishers were selling studies as well as impressions.

Already before the Civil War in America, British social criticism was swinging towards a more favorable view of America--in reaction, Nevins too simply suggests, to the earlier "Tory distortions." After the war and the surprising victory of the forces of union, America received great respect from most people in Britain. Thus analysis gradually displaced partisan horn-blowing as the century moved towards its own conclusion.[1]

American literature, too, was gaining recognition. Little review space was given to American literature because the

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[1]Nevins, op. cit., pp. 283-307, 423-468.

copyright confusion allowed American books to appear in the reprint class. This same fact, however, gave them wide circulation. Throughout the century American books had an increasing popularity; in the final decade of the century the English Catalogue listed ninety editions of Hawthorne, seventy of Holmes, sixty each of Twain and Irving, fifty each of Lowell, Cooper, and Howells.[1] Even Harper's Monthly found a good audience in Britain, hitting a circulation of 24,000 by 1882.[2]

We cannot pause to look at specific reviews of these popular American authors. But the extent of their popularity should be kept in mind. The general critics by this time had access to concrete illustrations of America's literature; they had less excuse for talking in the abstract about the prospects for American literature.

The extent to which the mood had shifted to one of sympathetic interest and hope can be sensed by perusing the general studies of America written by William E. Baxter, Lord Carlisle, Anthony Trollope, Herbert Spencer, and others. James Silk Buckingham, the founder of the Athenaeum, turned out a cumbersome

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[1]Equally surprising figures are indicated by Professor Brander Matthews in his pamphlet on the copyright issue, American Authors and British Piracies (1889). Matthews charged that in 1885 thirty-six titles out of ninety-one in Warne's "Star Series" were American; likewise thirty out of thirty-eight in Ward, Lock, and Tyler's "Home Treasury Library" and sixty out of eighty in the "Beeton's Humorous Books" series.

[2]J. Henry Harper, The House of Harper (New York, 1912), p. 475.

eight-volume study in 1841-1842 which is typical of the period, singing one lengthy chorus of praise punctuated by blasts of radical ideology.

There were many other such books. The best of the early ones was Alexander Mackay's three-volume The Western World (1849), which enjoyed great popularity and reigned supreme among British books on America until Bryce's American Commonwealth appeared in 1888.[1] Mackay was, like Buckingham, an ardent radical with a great enthusiasm for American society. He had no reservations about literature in such a society, and was pleased with the rapid growth of a truly distinctive literature. He appears to have thought this literature (Twain and Whitman had not yet published) well on its way to greatness:

> The American brain is as active as American hands are busy. It has already produced a literature far above mediocrity, a literature which will be greatly extended, diversified, and enriched, as by the greater spread of wealth the classes who can most conveniently devote themselves to its pursuit increase.[2]

By the 1850's, the atmosphere in Britain was relatively clear for a discussion of American literature. If the Civil War in the early sixties confused it, the confusion was temporary. The critical standards and issues and the hopes and fears for American civilization were fairly clear. To all appearances, the British were ready for Whitman and partially ready for James.

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[1] Nevins, op. cit., p. 346.

[2] Ibid., pp. 360-361. This seems an obvious echo of Tocqueville, op. cit., pp. 314-316.

PART III:

Walt Whitman and Henry James:
The Orientation of American Literature

CHAPTER SEVEN

WALT WHITMAN: THE NEW AGE AND THE NEW ART

Although he had his predecessors, Walt Whitman is surely the greatest of the champions of a native, independent, democratic American literature. The time was ripe for him. Emerson, Channing, Thoreau and others had prepared the way. So had the Democratic Review. The standard reference work on American literary history rightly calls his "Preface" to the first edition of Leaves of Grass "a synthesis of all earlier pleas for an American literature."[1] But Whitman came with more than just pleas and theories; he came with a book of unique American poems--a book which he entitled Leaves of Grass, a book which he once referred to anonymously as "that incongruous hash of mud and gold."[2]

He remained a strong advocate of a national literature throughout his life. Beginning already with the first reviews and editorials in the Brooklyn Eagle, his writings show a continuing concern with the new requirements of the New World, the inadequacy of European literary traditions for a socially emancipated people, the dangers of importing old and foreign ideas and

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[1] R. E. Spiller et al., Literary History of the United States (New York, 1948), III, 48.

[2] Collected Poems and Selected Prose, ed. Emory Holloway (London, 1938), p. 604. [This edition will hereafter be referred to as CPSP.]

forms. American society, as Whitman saw it, was a new and different society, a capstone to the European societies of the past, but also a new society starting afresh. His prophetic destiny was to indicate and create a character for the literature that she should produce. "Solitary, singing in the West," Whitman struck up for the New World.

Whitman's New World was not entirely an actual world. It was often only the dream-world of the Adam-myth that runs through American thought and literature. It was a world that Whitman felt compelled to help shape; it was, as R.W.B. Lewis says, "only one phase of the story imbedded in the American response to life."[1] Leslie Fiedler has said it better than anyone: Whitman, he tells us, was

> condemned to play the Lusty Innocent, the Noble Savage, by a literary tradition that had invented his country before he inhabited it....The whole Western world demanded of him the lie in which we have been catching him out, the image of America in which we no longer believe; the whole world cried to him, "Be the bard we can only dream! Chant the freedom we have imagined as if it were real!"[2]

This is true. But Whitman believed in his dream world. Except for moments of alarmed scepticism in Democratic Vistas, he trusted his vision of the New World and kept his faith. He was, after

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[1]R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam, pp. 4-5.

[2]Leslie Fiedler, "Images of Walt Whitman," in Milton Hindus, ed., Leaves of Grass One Hundred Years After (Stanford, 1955), p. 73.

all, an approximation of his own idea of the democratic bard: "As he sees the farthest he has the most faith."[1]

Although his New World was not entirely actual, it was not entirely a dream-world either. Professor Charles Feidelson[2] has argued with careful discrimination that the "newness" is a metaphysical newness, a progressively discovered symbolic reality. Whitman was not interested in describing reality, but in creating it. It was a matter of process, a process in which the voyaging ego (which is as much the reader as it is the poet) brings things from becoming to being by perceiving them symbolistically. He was a transcendentalist with an intense faith in symbolic reality.

This too is true, though we may legitimately question whether Whitman's contemporaries in Britain or America could be expected to recognize it with any degree of clarity. For Whitman himself was not clear about his symbolistic leanings. The better of his critics recognized that the "I" of the poems was more than Whitman himself, that his interest in the New Man was really an interest in "the changed attitude of the ego" towards the world, and that his "New World" was more than the American states. Without Feidelson's historical perspective, we can expect no more of them.

However subtle and complex we make his mission, his general

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[1] Democratic Vistas, quoted by J. M. Robertson, Walt Whitman (Edinburgh, 1884), p. 14.

[2] Symbolism in American Literature (Chicago, 1953), pp. 17-22.

importance as a spokesman is not likely to be underrated. The New Zealand critic who, in the context of a book on Mr. T. S. Eliot, makes a rejection of Whitman synonymous with a rejection of America,[1] does not really stand alone. In American criticism Whitman is often brought forward as a piece of heavy artillery to do battle with the highbrows who have not shaken themselves free of Europe.[2] But because the issues were not restricted geographically to America, because they were broad issues characteristic of the modern world, Whitman drew considerable attention from--and gave significant stimulation to--British writers and reviewers. They saw something of their own "new world," symbolistic or otherwise, in Whitman; they were quick to evaluate it.

There is some difficulty in reconstructing Whitman as he must have appeared to his contemporaries. They could not see the drift towards symbolism which we are only beginning to see. There is further difficulty in explaining his thought, fitting its strands into some kind of pattern.

> Do I contradict myself?
> Very well then I contradict myself,
> (I am large, I contain multitudes).[3]

He not only pushed aside the law of non-contradiction, but he warned his friends, with more dramatic flair and Socratic pose

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[1]Sydney Musgrave, Walt Whitman and T. S. Eliot (Wellington, N.Z., 1952).

[2]Leslie Fiedler, op. cit., p. 71.

[3]"Song of Myself," in CPSP, p. 84.

than truth, that he had no theories:

> I charge you, too, forever, reject those who would expound me--for I cannot expound myself.... I am something different: I don't provide theories for people: I ask them about their own theories--I spur them on so they do their own speculation.[1]

But these disavowals are really Whitman's mask; they are gestures of identification of the poet with his fellow men. The "I" is the symbolic ego, searching, creating. In spite of them Whitman has put together a forceful statement of the literary needs and principles of modern democratic society. If he cannot be reduced to a formula, the tendency and thrust of his position are still quite clear. He made his point often--so often that it is quite unlikely that any of his British critics could have escaped hearing him on the subject. Entire sections throughout the poems, and the whole of the long "By Blue Ontario's Shore," deal directly with the requirements of democratic American literature, as do Whitman's important prose pieces, especially the 1855 "Preface" (of which "By Blue Ontario's Shore" is a re-statement in verse), Democratic Vistas (1871), the Preface to As A Strong Bird on Pinions Free (1872), and A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads (1888).

There is a final difficulty: seeing Whitman's theories in relation to his creative achievements. He looks dull, witless, and pedestrian when we make him an expounder of ideas about

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[1]Quoted by Horace Traubel, "Introduction," Leaves of Grass (1) and Democratic Vistas (London, 1912), p. xi.

democracy and literature. And few poets can be quoted to their own disadvantage as extensively as Whitman can; perhaps no poet has unwittingly written so many parodies of himself. The truth is that Whitman, no keen judge of other literature,[1] was a very poor judge of his own. Perhaps the real point that Whitman demonstrates is this: the accomplishments and the blunders of an artist as artist have little to do with the theories about art that he holds. If some of the more prosaic or bombastic crudities of the "barbaric yawp" are the ill-formed progeny of Whitman's democratic poetics, so are the haunting moods and majestic, harmonious symbols of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed" and the striking unity of "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" its beautiful children. The balance is never easy to achieve. It must be remembered that Whitman did not always tie himself to the rigidity of his own poetics; he was scarcely conscious of the symbolism which Professor Feidelson finds in his work. But even if Whitman's poems are not always understandably results of his theories, the theories deserve attention: for he meant them, along with the poems, to describe and determine modern democratic literature.

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[1] It is amusing to recall, for example, that Whitman sent his sister a copy of Lady Audley's Secret (Nov. 23, 1866) and "a handsome little volume of Florence Percy's poems" (Christmas, 1866). CPSP, 962-3.

I.

Already in 1846, as a young journalist with vague aspirations to be a poet, Whitman was writing that America must rid itself of the dull influence of European literature.

> He who desires to see this noble Republic independent, not only in name but in fact, of all unwholesome foreign sway must ever bear in mind the influence of European literature over us.[1]

Already as a young man he felt confident that "God /has/ given the American mind powers of analysis and acuteness superior to those possessed by any other nation on earth."[2] Forty-two years later, old, sick, and unrecognized, he showed no alteration of feelings.

> Of the great poems received from abroad and from the ages, is there one that is consistent with these United States...? Is there one whose underlying basis is not a denial and insult to democracy? What a comment it forms, anyhow, on this era of literary fulfillment, with the splendid day-rise of science and resuscitation of history, that our chief religions and poetical works are not our own, nor adapted to our light, but have been furnish'd by far-back ages out of their arriere and darkness, or, at most, twilight dimness! What is there in those works that so imperiously and scornfully dominates all our advanced civilization, and culture?[3]

It was his conviction that the nation, like the people who constitute it, should bask in "the perfect uncontamination and

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[1] "Home Literature," CPSP, p. 554.

[2] Ibid.

[3] "A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 865.

solitariness of individuality."[1]

Notice how easily interchangeable the words *past* and *foreign* are for Whitman. The figure of a corpse can serve for either.

> America, curious toward foreign characters...
> Does not repel them or the past or what they have
> produced under their forms,
> perceives the corpse slowly borne from the house,
> Perceives that it waits a little while in the door.
> that it was fittest for its days,
> That its life has descended to the stalwart and well-
> shaped heir who approaches,
> And that he shall be fittest for his days.[2]

The heir, democracy, must found its own forms of art, education, and theology, "displacing all that exists, or that has been produced anywhere in the past, under opposite influences."[3] The poets of Europe and Asia had done their work; American poets must now come, not only to displace them, but also to surpass them.[4]

In justice to Whitman, whose nationalism and isolationism can easily be made absurd, it must be remembered that he acknowledged his debts to ancient and European traditions.

> In the name of these States shall I scorn the antique?
> Why these are the children of the antique to justify it.[5]

In reminiscing about old-world literature he said, "If I had not stood before those poems with uncovered head, fully aware of the

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[1] *Democratic Vistas*, p. 333.

[2] "By Blue Ontario's Shore," *CPSP*, p. 313.

[3] *Democratic Vistas*, p. 303.

[4] *Cf.* "By Blue Ontario's Shore," *CPSP*, p. 312.

[5] *CPSP*, p. 16.

colossal grandeur and beauty of form and spirit, I could not have written Leaves of Grass."[1] Even democracy is "earth's resumé entire."[2] But his tributes to tradition are rare, and they are almost negated by his sense of the separateness and distinctiveness of democratic American culture.

Whitman insisted upon cultural separation because, for one thing, he saw America as above and beyond Europe. This may sound naive. But Whitman, like many of his liberal contemporaries, believed in the evolutionary progress of history and regarded America as man's unqualified step towards further perfectability.[3] If this still sounds naive, we can remind ourselves again, as Professor David Daiches reminds us, that Whitman's America was not a statistical fact but a vision, a potential;[4] it was, in Leslie Fiedler's words, "made in France, the romantic notion out of Rousseau and Chateaubriand of an absolute anti-Europe, an utter anti-culture made flesh, the Noble Savage as a continent."[5] Whitman was aware of the actual shortcomings of American culture,

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[1] CPSP, p. 866.

[2] Ibid., p. 412.

[3] Whitman applies the same theory directly to his own work. "As America fully and fairly construed is the legitimate result and evolutionary outcome of the past, so would I dare to claim for my verse...." ("A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 866.)

[4] David Daiches, Literary Essays (Edinburgh, 1956), pp. 67-68.

[5] Fiedler, op. cit., p. 65.

and discussed them at length in Democratic Vistas. But the vision was more real to him, more compelling, than the actual. And the society which he envisaged had to have new standards, standards which, apparently because they were new, were better, and naturally displaced the old. Thus,

> ... [T]he Old World has had the poems of myths, fictions, feudalism, conquest, caste, dynastic wars, and splendid exceptional characters and affairs, which have been great; but the new world needs the poems of realities and science and of the democratic average and basic equality, which shall be greater.[1]

And thus he commended Shakespeare but found his style "stopping short of the grandest sort, at any rate for fulfilling and satisfying modern and scientific and democratic American purposes."[2] Whitman is here taking his place in a broad movement, didactic in character and realistic in its social concern--a movement of which Tolstoy is also a part. He did not want the past or European culture to contaminate this movement in America. Like Tolstoy, he found that Shakespeare's feudalistic treatment of common people in the comedies made these plays "altogether unacceptable" for the modern, enlightened world.[3]

But here the criterion is already shifting, overlapping Whitman's second condition for American culture. American culture had to be kept free of European influence because American culture

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[1] "A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 866.

[2] "A Look at Shakespeare," CPSP, p. 824.

[3] Ibid.

had to be a popular culture, giving body and voice to the "democratic average." This is partly what Whitman meant by the present, and partly what he meant by America--an age and a society of the "divine average." His cross-examination of the American writer of the future affirmed the need for complete rapport between the writer, the present, and the masses. (Note how quickly appropriate defendants come to mind as Whitman's questions are read: Henry James, for example, or T. S. Eliot.)

> ... /A/re you really of the whole People?
> Are you not of some coterie? some school or mere religion?
> Have you not imported this or the spirit of it in some ship?
> Has it not dangled long at the heels of the poets, politicians, literati, of enemies' lands?
> Does it not assume that what is notoriously gone is still here?[1]

II.

That the demand for a distinctively democratic literature became identified with the realistic movement is not accidental. For Whitman "realism" was a sine qua non of democratic literature. Healthy and vital democratic society had no use for romance. "As soon as histories are properly told," growls the 1855 Preface, "no more need of romances."[2] He thought "imported" literature to be--and one wonders from this how much of it he could have read--

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[1] "By Blue Ontario's Shore," CPSP, pp. 318-319.

[2] CPSP, p. 581.

> thin sentiments of parlours, parasols, piano-songs, ...or whimpering and crying about something, chasing one aborted conceit after another, and for ever occupied in dyspeptic amours with dyspeptic women.[1]

Whitman's urge to be real and vigorous and manly led him to strange positions as a critic. Leaves of Grass, he proudly affirmed, contains "nothing...for Beauty's sake." Its concern is with "the broadest average of humanity...in each of their countless examples and practical occupations in the United States today."[2] There is in all of this some of the Yankee practicality that made him cry, "Muscle and pluck forever!"[3]

In one of those unfortunate passages that can be quoted against him, Whitman pictures the muse pulling out of Greece and Rome and Europe and hurrying to America. It is here that she will find peace and the stuff of poetry;

> By thud of machinery and shrill steam whistle undismay'd,
> Bluff'd not a bit by drainpipe, gasometers, artificial fertilizers,
> Smiling and pleased with palpable intent to stay,
> She's here, install'd amid the kitchen-ware![4]

The muse in all that noise and metal: Whitman meant it. The common and the ordinary were the materials of art. He intended a general statement of aesthetics, and hoped it would be strictly enforced for all American artists. America, he announced, "shall

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[1] Democratic Vistas, p. 342.

[2] "A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 861.

[3] "Song of the Broad Axe," CPSP, p. 175.

[4] "Song of the Exposition," CPSP, p. 183.

receive no pleasure from violations of natural models, and must not permit them."[1] In painting or carving, or even in the illustration of papers and books, there must be nothing which "distorts honest shapes, or which creates unearthly beings or places or contingencies...."[2]

Underneath all this there is an unorthodox but thoroughgoing materialism. Whitman picked this up from his age and made it a condition of American thought and art. The fact that he was simultaneously a materialist and a spiritualist without admitting to being a dualist need not detain us here. Contradictions did not bother Whitman. His kind of materialism, with its strange jargon about "spiritualizing" material things, tells us something about the necessity of his moving towards symbolism; it is also, like phrenology, a curiosity of the man and his age. A good sample of it, and of the semantic tangles that accompanied it, can be found in the writings of Oscar L. Triggs, an American disciple of Whitman who lectured on Whitman before the Browning Society in London in 1892. Triggs saw engines and instruments to be the result of "the conquest of matter by the spirit of man." He went on to explain to his London audience: "The beautiful winged electric car which passes my door in Minneapolis like a thing bewitched, is a perpetual protest against materialistic

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[1] "Preface," 1855, CPSP, p. 581.

[2] Ibid.

ideas and the crowning witness to a people's ideal thought."[1] Walt Whitman would have liked that as heartily as Triggs liked Whitman.

This kind of unorthodox materialism, part of what Whitman thought was the New World way of looking at the world, lent some startling effects to his poetry. He seems to have been fond of the paradox. "I will make the poems of materials," he writes, "for I think they are to be the most spiritual poems."[2] This exposition of the divine within the common Whitman saw as the artist's greatest task. It is only within this context that we can read rightly his profession: "I accept Reality and dare not question it, Materialism first and last imbuing."[3]

Whitman felt that materialistic realism was demanded, not only by egalitarian democracy, but also by modern science. He was especially insistent upon this towards the end of his life. In "A Backward Glance" he discussed fact and imagination. "Whatever may have been the case in years gone by," he writes,

> the true use of the imaginative faculty of modern times is to give ultimate vivification to facts, to science, and to common lives, endowing them with glows and glories...which belong to every real thing, and to real things only.[4]

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[1]Oscar L. Triggs, Browning and Whitman: A Study in Democracy (London, 1893), p. 30.

[2]"Starting from Paumanok," CPSP, p. 17.

[3]"Song of Myself," CPSP, p. 48.

[4]"A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 861.

The modern American artist, he goes on, must

> conform with and build on the concrete realities and theories of the universe furnish'd by science...henceforth the only irrefragable basis for anything, verse included....[1]

He had little fear that science would devour poetry: science was only "a firmer, vaster, broader new area...to which the poetic genius must emigrate."[2] It was as important to new, modern literature as was the physical stuff of the actual world.

III.

In one of those interesting reviews which Whitman wrote anonymously in praise of himself and his book, he gives us a picture of the ideal American poet (himself) in the glory of his defiant independence of "culture":

> Self-reliant, with haughty eyes, assuming to himself all the attributes of his country, steps Walt Whitman into literature, talking like a man unaware that there was hitherto such a production as a book, or such a being as a writer.... Every word that falls from his mouth shows silent disdain and defiance of the old theories and forms.... Not a whisper comes out of him of the old stock talk and rhyme of poetry....[3]

This is the kind of proud, individualistic sneer that Whitman always had for the word "culture." He seems to have wanted an anti-aesthetic Yankee Bohemianism, thriving on muscle and crowds

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[1] "A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 865.

[2] Ibid., p. 868.

[3] Quoted by Bertram Dobell in his edition of James Thomson, Walt Whitman: Man and Poet (London, 1910), pp. x-xi.

and tram-rides and health rather than on old prints and French poets and the desperate consumptive cough. He liked to assert his separation from libraries and literature and manners. He was always trying to convince people that he read very little, that he went to school to the out-of-doors. In fact, he tried too hard: he had really read a great deal more than he cared to admit; he apparently felt his reading to be a kind of betrayal of his own beliefs.[1] For in the complex of those beliefs book was a kind of suspect word; and Whitman, to avoid bad company, re-assured his readers in Leaves of Grass:

> Camerado, this is no book,
> Who touches this touches a man....[2]

When dealing with this question, as with too many others, Whitman became a preacher rather than a poet. Culture, like foreign influence, he regarded as a Trojan horse; it threatened real danger to America. Thus,

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[1] Whitman deceived most of his contemporaries about his reading. Moncure Conway, for example, having been told by Whitman that he (Whitman) had very few books, went on at great length to explain to his readers Whitman's limited reading. [See C. W. Moulton, ed., The Library of Literary Criticism (Buffalo, 1905), VIII, 130.] Research in Whitman's writings and conversations reveals, however, that he had really read a great deal. Norman Foerster regards him, in quantity and quality, as a more thorough reader than Poe. (American Criticism, pp. 156-165.) Though his reading was sporadic and probably not always conscientious, some of it was surprisingly perspicacious. [See Maruice O. Johnson, Walt Whitman as a Critic of Literature (Lincoln, Neb., 1938).]

[2] "Songs of Parting," CPSP, p. 452.

> If you would be freer than all that has been before,
> come listen to me.
> Fear grace, elegance, civilization, delicatesse....
> Beware what proceeds the decay of the ruggedness of states
> and men.[1]

For culture, as Whitman conceived it (or failed to conceive it), lacks genuineness; it is artificial, not natural; it reduces the healthy responses to nature, which are instinctive in man, to nothingness.[2]

When Whitman must provide a replacement for the culture he would let die, he gets into trouble. The "healthy opposite" he would plant is usually nothing more than one of the platitudinous intangibles of the manly and open West. For him the argument was quite simple: you could choose between the sort of thing that Matthew Arnold, the apostle of culture, brought to Whitman's mind--"Hangings, curtains, finger-bowls, china-ware"[3]--and the sort of thing the outdoors brought to Whitman's mind--"an odor...as from the forests of pine in Maine, or breath of an Illinois prairie."[4]

Here again, in the construction of so gross an oversimplification of the concept of culture, Whitman's passion for democracy was at work. This is a New World, a world in which "genteel little creatures" cannot be poets; a world in which

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[1]"By Blue Ontario's Shore," CPSP, p. 312.

[2]Democratic Vistas, p. 330.

[3]Quoted by Lionel Trilling, Matthew Arnold (London, 1939), p. 397.

[4]"Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood," CPSP, p. 411.

> People's lips salute only doers, lovers, satisfiers,
> positive knowers,
> There will shortly be no more priests, I say their
> work is done....[1]

The over-simplification, the falseness of the antithesis, was inevitable. For Whitman's America was not an actual America; it was an America yet-to-be-realized, a living potentiality for the full development of a human greatness of a different and unprecedented kind--a natural greatness having nothing to do with the traditional distinctions of rank and class.

Still, his thinking on culture in America was directed to his own time. And what he really advocated, of course, was not the extinction of culture but the reformation of culture. The standards of the new culture will be very different from the standards of past cultures. Within it he "will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on equal terms."[2] He characterized the culture he envisaged in Democratic Vistas. "I should demand," he wrote,

> a programme of culture, drawn out, not for a single class alone, or for the parlours or lecture-rooms, but with an eye to the practical life, the west, the working men.... It must have for its spinal meaning the formation of a typical personality of character ...(which is) not restricted by conditions ineligible to the masses. The best culture will always be that of the manly and courageous instincts.[3]

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[1] "By Blue Ontario's Shore," CPSP, p. 320.

[2] "Song of Myself," CPSP, p. 49.

[3] Democratic Vistas, p. 331.

By what standards of taste and judgement can one evaluate the products of such a culture? How can the arts be guaranteed survival? Does not the narrow didacticism and the subjection of the artist to mass opinion deny the whole principle of culture? Such questions are an important part of the age. And so is Whitman's answer:

> ...We pronounce not so much against the principle of culture; we only supervise it, and promulgate along with it, as deep, perhaps a deeper, principle.[1]

And this principle (a radical one for any philosophy of culture) is, of course, the principle of equality. A free, unfettered, democratic society governed by the principle of equality would, thought Whitman, inspire, produce, cultivate, and correctly judge its own new arts.

IV.

The new writer and the new society would have to come to some sort of understanding about their relationship to each other. Whitman, like many critics and writers throughout the world in the nineteenth century,[2] regarded literature as a product of society, deriving its character from the society which spawns it. And American society, formed of ordinary people who do not know how

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[1] Democratic Vistas, p. 337.

[2] Cf. Brooks and Wimsatt, Literary Criticism: A Short History (New York, 1957).

it feels "to stand in the presence of superiors,"[1] gives the writer unsurpassed richness of subject and theme. American social habits, such as "the President's taking off his hat to them, not they to him--these too are unrhymed poetry." They only await "the gigantic and generous treatment" worthy of them.[2] His confident belief that American literature would outstrip all other literatures was based entirely upon his confident belief that American society would outstrip all other societies. The poet had only to link himself symbolically to the society. His optimism got him into a position from which he could scarcely understand how, by contrast, anything worthwhile could ever have been written in the Mediterranean area or in Europe. This is one of his most important statements:

> Think of the United States today...sixty or seventy millions of equals, with their lives, their possessions, their future--these incalculable, modern, American, seething multitudes around us, of which we are inseparable parts! Think, in comparison, of the petty environage and limited area of the poets of past or present Europe, no matter how great their genius. Think of the absence and ignorance, vitality, and the unprecedented stimulants of today and here. It almost seems as if a poetry with cosmic and dynamic features of magnitude and limitlessness suitable to the human soul, were never possible before. It is certain that a poetry of absolute faith and equality for the democratic senses never was.[3]

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[1] "Preface," 1855, CPSP, p. 583.

[2] Ibid.

[3] "A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 863.

So dependent is literature upon society, Whitman thought, that it cannot come from isolated individual writers who are at odds with their ages. It must be carefully remembered, he wrote, that

> first class literature does not shine by any luminosity of its own; nor do its poems. They grow out of circumstances.... The actual living light is always curiously from elsewhere....[1]

And yet, while literature is dependent upon society, the relationship is actually a reciprocal one for Whitman. Literature does not only feed on society; it also feeds society, and helps to form it. Literature, he noted, not only mirrored but also held together and gave support to "the feudal, ecclesiastical, dynastic world over there--forming its osseous structure...."[2] He saw the nineteenth century caught in what the sociologists call a cultural lag: the hold of "feudal" literature "still prevails to this day, in defiance of the mighty changes of time...."[3]

So Whitman's plea was for a new and more adequate literature, a literature adequate to express and to bind together (in the manner of the old bardic tradition) the new society--a literature which would derive its energy from a new "luminosity."

So far Whitman is quite clear. But it is just at this point that most of the questions arise. Whitman makes but little effort

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[1] "A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 862.

[2] Democratic Vistas, p. 305.

[3] Ibid.

to answer them. He seems to have been convinced that both the new literature and the new society would develop apace, hand in hand. He holds us off with that annoying manner that Mr. Ezra Pound writes of: Whitman's pretense of "conferring a philanthropic benefit on the race by recording his own self-complacency."[1] He gives us general statements, the thrust of which seem to be that American society, if true to itself, cannot but inspire great literature, and that this literature will be dependent upon the general public's acceptance of it: "The proof of a poet shall be sternly deferr'd till his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it."[2] This public acceptance raises no great problem, as the democratic society Whitman envisaged would recognize and honor good literature with confidence and sound judgment: "If its poets appear (the public) will in due time advance to meet them, there is no fear of mistake..."[3]

It is curious to see Whitman, with all his faith in "the word modern, the word en masse," living almost completely without honor in his own democratic society while winning quite considerable praise in "feudal-aristocratic" Britain.[4] But it is to his credit as a man that even this did not seem to shake his faith.

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[1]Ezra Pound, The Spirit of Romance (London, 1910), p. 178.

[2]Democratic Vistas, p. 320.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Cf. Harold Blodgett, Walt Whitman in England (Ithaca, 1934), p. vii, pp. 8, 9, et. seq.

His faith was not completely naive, either. He knew the weaknesses and dangers of a completely democratic culture theoretically as well as actually. Already in the 1855 "Preface," with an obvious touch of Carlylese, he took a glimpse at the horrible vision of a society reduced to the common level of life without spirit; he warned against

> ...the melancholy prudence of the abandonment of such a great being as man is, to the toss and pallor of years of money-making, with all their scorching days and icy nights...and the issuing sickness and desperate revolt at the close of a life without elevation or naivete....[1]

His respect (an almost inconsistent respect) for Carlyle and Hegel and other critics of democracy did not diminish: he considered their warnings, because they were plausible, to be of great value.[2] In Democratic Vistas Whitman himself called attention to the specific danger of producing a merely popular mass literature to the exclusion of an unheeded literature of quality.

> Today, in books, in the rivalry of writers, especially novelists, success (so called) is for him or her who strikes the mean flat average, the sensational appetite for stimulus.... To such...the audiences are limitless and profitable...while this day, or any day, to workmen portraying interior or spiritual life, the

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[1] CPSP, pp. 582-583.

[2] Whitman tells us that Democratic Vistas owes a debt to Shooting Niagara (footnote, p. 313). Whitman wrote two articles on Carlyle at the time of Carlyle's death. For a joint tribute to Hegel and Carlyle as critics of democracy, see also CPSP, p. 781.

> audiences were limited, and often laggard--but they last forever.[1]

"Mean flat average"--this from the exuberant poet who shouts in several places, "O Divine Average!" It would seem to indicate certain reservations about the brimming prospects of the new literature in the new society, or indicate at least an awareness of the gap between the dream and the actual in American society.

This kind of fear does not, however, occur to Whitman very often.[2] It is only a faint undertone. It crops up again three years before his death, when he speaks of an instinct within democracy to "clip, conform, bring in stragglers, and reduce everything to a dead level." But he was sure that individualism could cure this; and though modern science seemed to be endangering the individuality of man's soul, this was "an appearance only; the reality is quite different. The new influences, upon the whole, are surely preparing the way for grander individualities than ever."[3]

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[1] Democratic Vistas, p. 342.

[2] Nor does it occur to many of his disciples. Oscar L. Triggs, for example, bemoans "an almost total lack in criticism, of a serious study of literature from the standpoint of the people." (Triggs, op. cit., p. 6) "The higher literature is destined," says Triggs, "under our democratic advance, to come to the judgment of the people. And the people, I believe, will come to the masters of song with serious minds, asking not for entertainment, but for life.... Old formulae will have no power to chain and bind. Their criticism will care supremely for the soul of man." (Ibid., p. 7.)

[3] "A Backward Glance...," CPSP, p. 870.

Perhaps it was because Whitman never really studied the problem that he always retained his hope. The democratic American states, free from Europe, "with veins full of poetical stuff, most need poets, and are to have the greatest, and use them the greatest...."[1] This he never really doubted. What seemed to be an occasional doubt was really only an occasional trace of impatience (to which his own poverty and neglect surely entitled him) and eager anticipation. His role was that of both midwife and expectant father; he was confident but excited.

> Soul of love and tongue of fire!
> Eye to pierce the deepest depths and sweep the world!
> Ah Mother, prolific and full in all besides, yet
> how long barren, barren?[2]

But the new society was such that the barrenness was soon to be over:

> Poets to come! Orators, singers, musicians to come!
> Not today is to justify me and answer what I am for,
> But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental,
> greater than before known,
> Arouse! for you must justify me.[3]

V.

Many literary revolts are revolts against what are at the time conventional mechanics of literature. But Whitman, in demanding a new democratic literature, was concerned with much more than

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[1] "By Blue Ontario's Shore," CPSP, p. 316.

[2] Ibid.

[3] "Poets to Come," CPSP, p. 13.

that. This must be clearly understood. The observation becomes sharpened if we note, perhaps unfairly, that Whitman himself as a matter of fact inherited far too many of the poorer conventions. He used the archaisms thee and thou to address everything from locomotives to prostitutes; he generally scorned "average speech," and favored some jolting poetic diction. His use of the sea is a case in point: it is not so much a use of symbol as it is a reliance on a handy prop. British readers may not understand the banality and triteness of that old Midwest picnic-orator's catalogue of sea, ship, compass, billows, and port as an easy metaphor for "life." It has haunted the language since Washington, in his farewell address, talked of steering the ship of state. But Whitman took even Lincoln, a treasure-house of native American characteristics, all of them distinctly non-nautical, and put him out to sea as a dying captain in order to mourn him. He began another eulogy of Lincoln with "No more for him life's stormy conflicts";[1] he addressed the moon as "Thou orb aloft full dazzling!";[2] and he talked of going "down history's great highways,/ Ever undimn'd by time..."[3] and of "acting that great play on history's stage eterne."[4]

This is not to suggest that Whitman was a conventional poet completely at home with the conventions. We need only glance at

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[1] CPSP, p. 309.

[2] Ibid., p. 417. [3] Ibid., p. 436. [4] Ibid., p. 463.

the diction, the stanza forms, the length of the lines, the use of symbols and of parallel structure to remind ourselves that Whitman was an innovator of considerable accomplishment. This is not to suggest, either, that he was an inferior poet. Mr. Randall Jarrell has done an excellent job of reminding twentieth-century readers of the worth of Whitman--by the excellent expedient of gathering into one essay a kind of anthology of Whitman's better lines.[1] It is only to suggest that form and technique seem to have been a kind of accident for Whitman, sometimes happy, sometimes disastrous; that, despite his occasional grumbling about

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[1]"To show Whitman for what he is," writes Mr. Jarrell, "one does not need to praise or explain or argue, one needs simply to quote." The quotations show us "a poet of the greatest and oddest delicacy and originality and sensitivity, so far as words are concerned." "In modern times," Jarrell asks, "what controlling, organizing, selecting poet has created a world with as much in it as Whitman's, a world that so plainly is the world?" He cites several sustained passages, and even a number of the catalogues; among the individual lines that he cites are these: "Agonies are one of my changes of garments"; the image of himself "leaping chasms with a pike-pointed staff, clinging to topples of brittle and blue"; the carpenter planeing, "the tongue of his foreplane whistles its wild ascending lisp"; "Three scythes at harvest whizzing in a row from three lusty angels with shirts bagg'd out at their waists,/ The snag-toothed hostler with red hair redeeming sins past and to come"; the poignant and psalm-like image of God, "the hugging and loving bed-fellow (who) sleeps at my side through the night, and withdraws at the break of day with stealthy tread,/ Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels, swelling the house with their plenty"; finally, the dazzlingly effective lines on music and metaphysics: "The orchestra whirls me wider than Uranus flies,/ It wrenches such ardors from me I did not know I possess'd them,/ It sails me, I dab with bare feet, they are lick'd by the indolent waves,/ I am cut by bitter and angry hail, I lose my breath,/ Steep'd amid honey'd morphine, my windpipe throttled in fakes of death,/ At length let up again to feel the puzzle of puzzles,/ And that we call Being." [Poetry and the Age (New York, 1955), pp. 101-120.]

conventions and traditional forms, he was not very intent upon consciously altering or displacing them; that his demand for a democratic literature was much more than a demand for fresh and new techniques.

What he wanted, more significantly, was a new literature rising out of and expressing a new perspective, "the changed attitude" of the voyaging ego. Literature must henceforth see all men as divine[1] and as laws unto themselves.[2] It must "inspire itself with science and the modern," and bend itself "toward the future, more than the past."[3] In this new literature, character will be the main requirement, "not mere erudition or elegance."[4] While cutting itself free of Europe and the past it must have "entire faith in itself, and in the products of its own democratic spirit, only."[5] It must speak for the whole of the people, not "some coterie...some school or mere religion."[6] It must be in no way exclusive; instead, its poets will come to each man and to each woman and say,

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[1]"What do you suppose I would intimate to you in a hundred ways, but that man or woman is as good as God,
And that there is no God any more divine than yourself?"
(CPSP, p. 234.)

[2]"The purpose of democracy," says Whitman, "is to illustrate, at all hazzards, this doctrine or theory that man, properly trained in sanest, highest freedom, may and must become a law, and a series of laws, unto himself." (Democratic Vistas, p. 313.)

[3]Ibid., p. 346. [4]Ibid., p. 347. [5]Ibid., p. 346.

[6]CPSP, p. 318.

> 'Come to us on equal terms, only then can you understand us. We are no better than you. What we inclose /sic/, you inclose, what we enjoy you may enjoy.'[1]

In this new literature there will be no room for doubt or ennui,[2] It must be a literature of "cheerful simplicity"[3] and faith and optimism; within it "no man thenceforward shall be degraded for ignorance or weakness or sin."[4] Notions of hell and original sin must be displaced by the new human religion of innate goodness, and this shall be "part of the test of the great literatus."[5]

Whitman complained that American society held itself back, and therefore postponed the day of its great achievement in literature. It did this mainly by holding to foreign or conventional or unscientific beliefs.[6] But here as everywhere progress seemed inevitable. The liberal-democratic outlines for both the society

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[1] "Preface," 1855, CPSP, p. 578.

[2] Ibid., p. 573; Democratic Vistas, p. 348.

[3] Democratic Vistas, p. 348.

[4] "Preface," 1855, CPSP, p. 573.

[5] Democratic Vistas, p. 348.

[6] Whitman complains, for example, of the strength of "outmoded" religious ideas. Science is absolute, a bursting sun that will not set. "But against it, deeply entrenched, holding possession, yet remains...the fossil theology of the...superstitious, untaught and credulous, fable-loving, primitive ages of humanity." (Democratic Vistas, p. 343 n.) Unprogressive ideas are also kept in circulation by "unregenerate poetry." (Ibid.) Religion is too important to be entrusted to the churches; "it must be consigned henceforth to democracy en masse and to literature." (CPSP, p. 726.) The states and cities must "resist much, obey little...." (CPSP, p. 10.)

and the literature--a narrowly didactic voice of the society--were set.

The characteristics we have been listing, all of them affecting the spirit and content of the new literature, were to Whitman the important characteristics. Its standards of form, said Whitman, relying on the romantic tradition, were to be only the standards of nature.[1] If we mean by form a conscious concern with craft and design and technique, then we are talking about something that Whitman regarded as being merely "aristocratic-European"; American writers should have little concern with form, for form should be immediate, spontaneous, created by spirit and emotion. In democratic literature, art and nature should be one.

It has been argued that Whitman's "democratic aesthetics" stop just short of advocating anarchy and complete formlessness in art.[2] This is true enough if we derive the theory only from Whitman's utterances and not from his practice. In practice Whitman was at times the bungler who lent himself to parody and at other times a great poet, a master craftsman. "To be an artist," said Sir James Barrie in Sentimental Tommy, " is a great thing, but to be an artist and not know it is the most glorious plight in the world." At times this seems to have been Whitman's

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[1] Democratic Vistas, p. 348.

[2] There is a lengthy discussion of this in Solomon Fishman, The Disinherited of Art: Writer and Background. See especially pp. 154-156.

plight. He would have chosen it for the writers who were to follow him as the shapers of the great new literature. For their work would be characterized mainly by its content, its spirit, its rapport with the mass of free men; its form would matter little; it would be, like Whitman's at its best, proper to the spirit and content, transparent, free, organic.

VI.

Much of the relevance of Whitman for the present time, in America or elsewhere, lies in the fact that his prophecy missed the mark so widely. Even Mark Twain, for all his nationalism and his desire to deflate Europe, defected. His depiction of American society in "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg," or even in Huckleberry Finn, is not in the tradition of the "new literature" that Whitman had in mind. It was Twain who scowled, through the device of Pudd'nhead Wilson's caustic calendar, that "It was wonderful to find America, but it would have been more wonderful to miss it." The case of Henry James is obvious. Is it not fair to say that most major American writers since Whitman, especially the writers in the twentieth century, write out of protest against Whitman's kind of America and his kind of literature? Add to the list Henry Adams, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens: all of them have left the main stream of American life; most of them are, in some sense, traditionalists; they do not attempt to speak for the "whole people" but are "of some coterie, some group"; they do not find the divine in the

common; they are formalists. Their achievement seems almost dependent upon their alienation from what is supposed to be the spirit of American society. That spirit is roughly the same as it was in Whitman's day: but the attitude of present writers towards it, and the basic beliefs of post-Whitman writers, have changed radically.

Whitman's experiments in language have, of course, had their influence, especially on the symbolists. But his effect on the form of modern literature, Bewley[1] reminds us, has not been entirely fortunate.

> His poetic discoveries were real enough in their way, but they had an effect on American art somewhat similar to the effects of the New World on Spain. The sudden acquisition of all that gold to be had with so little effort undermined everybody's morale, and in the end the losses may very well have exceeded the profit.

Significantly, it is an Englishman, D. H. Lawrence, who comes closest to stating what may be the mood and the psychology of the writers who have by-passed Whitman. They are not at home with Whitman because they do not belong to his America. Writes Lawrence:

> Men are free when they are obeying some deep, inward voice of religious belief. Obeying it from within. Men are free when they belong to a living, organic, <u>believing</u> community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealized purpose. Not when they are escaping to some wild west. The most unfree souls go west, and shout of freedom. Men are freest when they are most

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[1] <u>Complex Fate</u>, p. 151.

> unconscious of freedom. The shout is a rattling of chains, always was.[1]

In any case this shift of belief in American literature--certainly not restricted to American literature--makes a study of Whitman criticism in the nineteenth century the more essential and revealing: for the rumbles of intelligent dissent can be heard before the holocaust of World War I, before Hulme and Wyndham Lewis and Eliot, before Trumbull Stickney and George Cabot Lodge.

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[1]D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classical American Literature (Garden City, 1951), pp. 16-17.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HENRY JAMES: ART, EUROPE, AND AMERICA

Four days after the publication of Whitman's Leaves of Grass (July, 1855), Henry James, a boy of twelve, arrived in Europe with his family. Oddly enough, it was the same summer in which James A. McNeil Whistler, a jaunty, cocky twenty-one-year-old American fresh from his reading of La Vie de Boheme, arrived in Paris to study art. Hawthorne, with less intensity, was beginning the third of his seven years in Europe. While the prevailing orientation of a whole generation of Americans was towards the new man and the frontier, Henry James was to be found among a passionate minority of Americans who were oriented towards what James later called "the rich, the deep, the dark old world." James, already for the second time and not for the last time, was facing eastward, drinking in European education and culture.

His early training is important. He grew up seeing his parents lost in American ideology, "homesick...for the ancient order," and he came quite early to assume that the condition of living in such an order would constitute a precious kind of success.[1] In his boyhood he was exposed to little of the spirit of cultural nationalism as it was being expounded by the

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[1]Henry James, A Small Boy and Others (London, 1913), pp. 88-89.

Democratic Review and by Walt Whitman in the Brooklyn Eagle. His early years were dominated by talk of Europe, European books, "the strong smell of paper and printer's ink, known to us as the English smell."[1]

His brilliant and eccentric father, in a letter to Emerson which Mr. Van Wyck Brooks regards as "heretical,"[2] explained that he was taking the children abroad in search of "a better sensuous education."[3] They were already soaking up more of European art and literature than Yankee convention thought advisable;[4] but the elder James was an individualist with a plan; his patriotism (of which he really had a great deal) would be "livelier on the other side of the water";[5] it was important that his children's education be free of dogma and moral judgment, so that they could find the Divine Truth, imminent in the world, for themselves.[6]

This strange migration became, for Henry James, a life pattern. Out of it, out of this violently atypical and yet peculiarly

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[1] A Small Boy, p. 86.

[2] Van Wyck Brooks, The Pilgrimage of Henry James (London, 1928), pp. 1-2.

[3] Quoted by Leon Edel, Henry James: The Untried Years, 1843-1870 (London, 1953), p. 122.

[4] James read Punch with some regularity. The first book to really impress him was Baroness Tautphoeus's The Initials--a book with an international theme similar to that of Daisy Miller. He also read a good deal of Dickens. Cf. Ibid., pp. 97-101.

[5] Ibid., p. 140. [6] Ibid., p. 118.

American situation, came one of the major shapers of American literature. There was plenty of Whitman's "enemy," Europe, for young Henry James; although to balance it the circus and the popular theatre were also allowed into the educational plan. Such training gave him, as he himself said, his "first glimpse of that possibility of a 'free play of mind' over a subject" which was to throw him at a later stage of culture into the critical arms of Matthew Arnold.[1] He had been given no standard by which to judge the host of facts; he acquired "a terrible need for order, for design, for apprehending--and later communicating" the world about him.[2]

It is by the literature resulting from this need that James must ultimately stand or fall. Still, the milieu which he represents, with its sharp challenge to the idea of a simple native literature as represented by Whitman, Twain, Anderson, and Wolfe, is of great importance. The need which James and others feel for Europe, the past, social complexity, and tradition represents a major dissent from a strong and popular drift in modern literature.

The conflict between the two forces has been at times surprisingly intense. Until recently the odds in American criticism have been heavily against James. The liberals, descendants of Emerson and of the Democratic Review, have drawn him at worst as

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[1] A Small Boy, p. 171.

[2] Edel, op. cit., p. 119.

a dandy who, oppressed by the vulgarity of all that was genuinely American, spent his life gossiping and drinking tea with displaced but wealthy old European ladies; they have drawn him at best as an original writer whose flight and rootlessness and seclusion forced him into thinness, decline, and eventual sterility. Van Wyck Brooks has been the standard-bearer of this school; in The Pilgrimage of Henry James (1925), and again in The Flowering of New England, he belabored the thesis that James was ruined by his expatriation. Vernon Louis Parrington, a highly influential critic, created something of a scandal by excommunicating James from American literature in his monumental three-volume Main Currents in American Thought. Parrington allowed James a scant three pages, which he concluded with the revealing remark, "Yet how unlike he is to Sherwood Anderson, an authentic product of the American consciousness!"[1] The influence of Parrington and of Brooks has been very extensive; one finds a jolting statement of it, for example, in the widely used College Book of American Literature: "It is not certain that Henry James really belongs to American literature, for he was critical of America and admired Europe." Such extremism, if it had no other value, sharpened the issue and brought forth the more searching studies of such James scholars as F. O. Matthiessen, Leon Edel, Phillip Rahv, Edna Kenton, and William Van O'Connor.

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[1]V. L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, III, 241.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine James and his work, not fully, but as an expression of another important strain in modern literature, and as an expression of the nineteenth-century revolt against the literature of the "new society." Special attention will be given to James's treatment of the relationship between the artist and modern society--the problem of orientation--as it is found in his critical pieces, biographies, and letters as well as in pieces of fiction selected for their relevance.

I. "DISPATRIATISM"

The obvious question in James--the question of his expatriation--deserves to be cleared up first, because it pervades all other questions. Whitman was certain that democratic America was naturally self-sufficient for literature; James was certain that it was not. It is tempting to over-simplify this, to track down the details of James's implicit criticism and then deal with him as one who has deliberately snapped off the roots which had started in American soil. But the case is fuller and far more interesting than that.

In 1898, James wrote an essay (never since reprinted) called "The Storyteller at Large: Mr. Henry Harland." The theme of the essay was expatriation, and James registered his extreme disapproval of its rootlessness, its sickly attachment to "the "Europe of the American mind." Obviously self-conscious about his own unpopular position, he coined a word which defines that position accurately: dispatriation. He meant by it simply a

detachment in viewing, not a severance from interest in, one's homeland. The essay advocated, much in the manner of Arnold's plea for "disinterestedness," a dispassionate pursuit of truth; it was a plea (in our current trite phrase) for world citizenship, for social adjustment to the fact that "the globe is fast shrinking, for the imagination, to the size of an orange, to be played with...."[1] It is both charitable and accurate to adopt the word and to call James a dispatriate.

He was twenty-five when he first embarked for Europe alone; he had spent seven consecutive years in America, most of them at Harvard, and was already making a good reputation as a promising young writer. Indeed, three years earlier William Dean Howells had rated him "gifted enough to do better than anyone has yet done towards making us a real American novel."[2] The reason for his early self-exile is not perfectly clear. Part of it, surely, was a matter of intellectual loneliness.[3] There were also other personal reasons: his health and the fact that Harvard friends had gone on before. He could look back years later, however, and perceive that he had been obeying "impulses deeper than reason." Significantly there was no apparent quarrel with American culture; there was rather a personal feeling that he himself

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[1]Quoted by Edna Kenton, "Henry James in the World." Hound and Horn, VII (April-June 1934), 506-8.

[2]Edel, Untried Years, pp. 275-6.

[3]Ibid., p. 252.

did not fit, could not absorb from America, had not the requirements for becoming an indigenous writer.[1] In his own disinterested way, he knew America well. He had read Hawthorne eagerly, discussed American literature and its possibilities, and sought out the "American spirit" in respect of which he thought he had been starved. He wished to "rinse (his) mouth of the European aftertaste in order to do justice to whatever of the native bittersweet might offer itself."[2]

Two years before leaving for Europe, he wrote his feelings about writing in America to his friend Thomas Sargent Perry. He felt, he told Perry, like "a man of the past, of a dead generation." His only chance for success was "to let all the winds of the west blow through me at will." On both these counts he was Whitman's dead opposite. He was, however, extremely conscious of the fact that he was an American: "We are," he tells Perry, "Americans born--il faut en prendre son parti. I look upon it as a great blessing...." But the great blessing is a rather curious one: "...to be an American is an excellent preparation /italics mine/ for culture." In extolling the "exquisite qualities" of the American race, he hits upon an idea which is at the heart of his attitude towards American literature and gives birth to his dispatriation:

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[1]F. W. Dupee, Henry James (American Men of Letters Series) (London, 1951), pp. 67-86.

[2]Notes of a Son and Brother (London, 1914), p. 284.

> We have exquisite qualities as a race, and it seems to me that we are ahead of the European races in the fact that more than either of them we can deal freely with forms of civilization not our own, can pick and choose and assimilate and in short (aesthetically &c.) claim our property wherever we find it.[1]

This dealing "freely with the forms of civilization not our own" is Henry James's starting point. He tried to keep this detachment throughout his life. He was not merely fleeing; he was trying (almost patriotically) to put into practice the one great advantage of the American writer. In a different sense from Whitman he was seeking and looking towards a distinctively national literature:

> To have no national stamp has hitherto been a regret and a drawback, but I think it not unlikely that American writers may yet indicate that a vast intellectual fusion and synthesis of the various National tendencies of the world is the condition of more important achievements than any we have seen. I expect nothing great in your lifetime or mine, perhaps; but my instincts quite agree with yours in looking to see something original and beautiful disengage itself from our ceaseless fermentation and turmoil. You see I am willing to leave it a matter of instinct. God speed the day.[2]

His dispatriation never sounded harsh notes of hostility towards America. During the first interruption of his life abroad--he was back in America during 1871--he sent to Charles E. Norton his conclusion that "the face of nature and civilization in this our

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[1]Edel, op. cit., p. 269.

[2]Ibid., pp. 269-270.

country is to a certain point a very sufficient literary field."[1] He bewailed American provincialism and complained that "there is but one word to be used with regard to [Americans] --vulgar, vulgar, vulgar";[2] but this was not mere snobbishness; it was the honest protest of an energetic twenty-six year old cultivated American (who had drunk deeply of Europe), a protest against Mark Twain's kind of Yankee ridicule of all that is merely different from America. In the same letter, one of his first from Europe, he went on to say, echoing Arnold,

> On the other hand, we seem a people of character, we seem to have energy, capacity and intellectual stuff in ample measure. What I have pointed out as our vices are the elements of the modern man with culture quite left out.[3]

It is almost a description of Strether in The Ambassadors or of Christopher Newman in The American. Edel rightly points out that James invariably stressed not the deficiencies but the "innate nobility" of his "innocent" American characters in Europe.[4] He never lost sight of America. "I know what I am about," he wrote to William James in 1878, "and I have always my eyes on my native land."[5] Mary Garland's feeling in Rome in James's first novel is surely his own: "To enjoy so much beauty

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[1]Henry James, Letters, edited by Percy Lubbock (London, 1920), I, 30.

[2]Ibid., p. 22. [3]Ibid.

[4]Edel, op. cit., p. 310.

[5]Letters, I, 60.

and wonder is to break with the past...." But Rowland's answer is also James's answer: "Forget it, turn away from it, give yourself up to this.... Don't mind the pain.... Enjoy, enjoy; it's your duty."[1]

None of this is the language of a bitter expatriate, seeking freedom and pleasure in hasty flight. And there is always this note of duty and necessity in James's description of his position. He complained to Howells of "this destiny of desolate exile--this dreary necessity."[2]

Just as he avoided being hostile to America, so he avoided a naive satisfaction with Europe. At the beginning of his dispatriation he wrote to Norton,

> It's a complex fate, being an American, and one of the responsibilities it entails is fighting against a superstitious valuation of Europe.[3]

He determined to avoid provincialism at all costs, and he knew (perhaps from Arnold) the easy trap of European provincialism. His dispatriation had to avoid all risk of seeing life through the given spectacles of <u>any</u> culture: for any one of them he regarded as inferior to the position of being able to "deal freely with the forms of civilization not our own." He did a surprising amount of theorizing about his position as a dispatriate.

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[1] Henry James, <u>Roderick Hudson</u> (London, 1921), pp. 292-4.

[2] <u>Letters</u>, I, 34.

[3] <u>Ibid</u>., I, 30-31.

His studies of artists, first published in Harper's and collected in Picture and Text (1893), show his concern: four of the eight artists he considered (Edwin A. Abbey, Frank Millet, Charles S. Reinhart, and John Singer Sargent) were American expatriates. The essay on Henry Harland is another study of an American expatriate. But the best and most revealing of these is the two-volume study of William Wetmore Story and his Friends,[1] a charming and fascinating document of James's own relations with Europe. James reveals Story, an American sculptor, as a man who drank too eagerly of the richness of Europe; he was ruined by his own lack of detachment. Unable to survive transplantation, he became a European provincial, "a beautiful sacrifice to a noble mistake." Roderick Hudson's tragedy is caused in part by the same kind of failure. Even Hawthorne, in James's view, was hurt by Europe; his limited genius was inadequate to Europe, and he "forfeited a precious advantage in ceasing to tread his native soil."[2]

James's sense of intricate balance and cautious detachment can be seen not only in his fiction and criticism, but also in his life and letters. The excitement he felt upon meeting

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[1]Though generally ignored, this book is finally getting some attention as an important work. See especially M. D. Zabel's The Portable Henry James (New York, 1951), p. 689, and Philip Rahv's The Discovery of Europe (Boston, 1947), p. 270.

[2]Henry James, Hawthorne (London, 1879), p. 165.

Turgenev indicates a feeling of kinship: for Turgenev was also an émigré; Russian society, like American society, was in a state of solution and formation, and Turgenev was having what James called "a poet's quarrel with it."[1] James saw Turgenev, as he was beginning to see himself, as a kind of missionary, alienated from the soil he loved, looking to Europe for the salvation of his countrymen. This was inspiring to James (as was his glimpse of the distinguished Turgenev playing charades on all fours in a smart Parisian drawing-room); but as he began to assume Turgenev's attitude, he remembered the pitfalls of "too fond an attachment." We can look at him with both awe and amusement as he shuttles back and forth between London and Paris during the beginning of his European sojourn, dispatching casual letters about his changing feelings towards each. In May, 1876 he is in Paris,

> turning into an old, and very contented, Parisian: I feel as if I had stuck roots into the Parisian soil, and were likely to let them grow tangled and tenacious there.[2]

But such attachment would never do for James, and he soon felt the old pull back to England. Two months later he wrote:

> My last layers of resistance to a long-encroaching weariness and satiety with the French mind and its utterance has fallen from me like a garment. I have done with 'em, forever, and am turning English all over.[3]

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[1]Henry James, French Poets and Novelists (London, 1893), p. 220.

[2]Letters, I, 48. [3]Ibid., I, 51.

And so back to England and a fresh feeling of detachment. Only a year later he wrote:

> To tell the truth, I find myself a good deal more of a cosmopolitan (thanks to that combination of the continent and the U. S. A. which has formed my lot) than the average Briton of culture.[1]

But again this could not last; in June, 1879 he lamented that

> I am living here / London / too long to be an observer-- I am sinking into dull British acceptance and conformity.[2]

In 1884 he was again in Paris, writing with enthusiasm about the refreshment of his renewed acquaintance with Daudet, de Goncourt, and others.

> Seeing these people does me a world of good, and this intellectual vivacity and raffinement make an English mind seem like a sort of gluepot.[3]

But four years later James was again the dispassionate observer, neither British nor American, dealing with both nationalities in English settings:

> I have not the least hesitation in saying that I aspire to write in such a way that it would be impossible for an outsider to say whether I am an American writing about England or an Englishman writing about America (dealing as I do with both countries) ....[4]

The art of being an American European, the kind of disinterested European that James felt only an American could be, became less demanding as James matured. He succeeded admirably. His novels attest to the fact that, while his experience of Europe

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[1] Letters, I, 55.

[2] Ibid., I, 69. [3] Ibid., I, p. 103. [4] Ibid., I, p. 143.

was rich and deep, he did avoid the "superstitious valuation" which he saw spoiling the work of his fellow hungry exiles. He was, in fact, profoundly American. Only an American could portray Americans as James did, especially in his last three novels. Howells was one of the few of James's American contemporaries who recognized this. He credited James with planting "the seeds of an imaginative literature" which was as truly "native to our soil" as any yet known.[1] Howells, while dying, after writing his last letter, set to work on two papers on "The American James." Unfortunately, the papers were never finished; they were designed to argue that James, as Howell's fragmentary manuscript tells us, "was American to his heart's core to the day of his death.... He was never anything but American."[2] Many critics of the forties and fifties agree.

It is necessary to keep firmly in mind these principles of dispatriation in James because they throw light on the grey undercurrents of his thought regarding literature in democratic American society. He went into exile, not with a sense of bitterness but with a sense of duty to American letters. He felt sorely, as had Hawthorne, the need for tradition and history; but he sought them in Europe objectively, in a manner which only an American

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[1]Quoted by Christoph Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James, p. 152.

[2]Mildred Howells, ed., The Life in Letters of William Dean Howells (Garden City, 1928), II, 394-396.

could adopt. He was not torn between two cultures, for the position he sought and needed was precisely between them. While Whitman, "The solitary singer in the West," was praising the advantages of America's cultural isolation, James was seeking experience and literary soil in the opposite direction. His search was quite conscious. He saw and commended Hawthorne's effort to create in isolation from Europe, but he found the result wanting in fullness; he saw Story's attempt to leave America behind and to transplant himself completely in Europe, and he found the result still more disastrous; James decided to experiment with the literary sum of America plus Europe. For him, characteristically, one's country did not define one's subject, but one's relation to one's subject. He sought a point of observation and a source of literary nourishment which was out of the reach of a nationalist, be he American or European. And yet, James was convinced that it was the peculiar mission of the American, deprived necessarily of cultural depth at home, to reach this point. America's isolation could, as Whitman said, be turned to advantage; but whereas Whitman defined this advantage as the freedom to create new forms independent of Europe and the past, James defined it as the freedom to skim dispassionately the best from a Europe which is not our own.

Mr. T. S. Eliot, in the second year of his own "dispatriation," said:

> It is the final perfection, the consummation of an American to become, not an Englishman, but a European--something which no born European, no European of any nationality, can become.[1]

Henry James would surely have agreed.

II. EUROPE AND THE PAST

We have seen, in defining James's dispatriation, that he looked to Europe for the salvation of American culture and literature. He was convinced that it takes "an old civilization to set a novelist in motion," for he must feed upon matured customs, manners, usages, habits, forms.[2] Goethe, in the heat of liberal passion, had said,

> America, you fare much better
> Than this old continent of ours.
> No basalt rocks your land enfetter,
> No ruined towers.

But James, perceiving deeply the limitations put upon genius by the absence of an historical past, echoed the famous passage of Hawthorne's on the need for ruins:

> "No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles,

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[1] T. S. Eliot, "On Henry James," in F. W. Dupee, The Question of Henry James, pp. 123-4. (Reprinted from Little Review, August, 1918.)

[2] Letters, I, p. 72.

> nor manners, nor old country-houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages, nor ivied ruins; ...no great Universities nor public schools--no Oxford, nor Eaton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class--no Epsom nor Ascot!"[1]

The whole theme of the study of Hawthorne--which is at the same time an excellent study of James himself and his efforts to cope with American society as a writer--plays about this emptiness, this sterility, this bare newness of America. The moral of Hawthorne's career, said James,

> is that the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion.[2]

If Hawthorne could fight his way through by becoming a recluse and soaking himself in the narrow confines of New England Colonial history, he was far from ordinary and was forced to too great a sacrifice. More typical was Theobald, the tragic old American painter in the Madonna of the Future, who says of Florence:

> I owe her everything...it's only since I came here that I've really lived, intellectually and aesthetically speaking.[3]

What is it that the artist must seek in Europe? Why does he really need the ingredients which James so often reiterates?

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[1]Henry James, Hawthorne (London, 1879), p. 43. (English Men of Letters Series.)

[2]Ibid., p. 3.

[3]Henry James, Stories of Artists and Writers, ed. F. O. Matthiessen (New York, 1944), p. 22.

Whitman, of course, thought this kind of talk dandified rubbish; and James was not very specific. For one thing, he saw it as a search for wider scope and deeper penetration. History, custom, "a complexity of manners and types," these things are needed "to form a fund of suggestion for the novelist."[1] The past is needed to give range to the creative imagination; it must be "a palpable imaginable visitable past."[2] But the past must also be visitable because of its simple superiority to the present as a time of great art, great models, rapport between the artist and society. Here, for example, is the wildly idealistic Theobald describing a beautiful Florentine square on a quiet night:

> The present is sleeping; the past hovers about us like a dream made visible. Fancy the old Florentines strolling up in couples to pass judgment on the last performance of Michael, of Benvenuto! We should come in for a precious lesson if we might overhear what they say. The plainest burgher of them, in his cap and gown, had a taste in the matter. That was the prime of art, sir.... We live in the evening of time. We grope in the grey dusk, carrying each our little taper of selfish and painful wisdom....[3]

These days of illumination, however, are gone:

> Visions are rare; we've to look long to have them. But in meditation we may still cultivate the ideal; round it, smooth it, perfect it.[4]

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[1] Hawthorne, p. 43.

[2] Henry James, The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur (London, 1935), p. 164.

[3] Writers and Artists, p. 20.

[4] Ibid., p. 26.

Such meditation, of course, is almost impossible in an American city, with no visible reminders of that lost age of Raphael when life demanded art, when

> people's religious and aesthetic needs went arm in arm, and there was, as I may say, a demand for the Blessed Virgin, visible and adorable, which must have given firmness to the artist's hand....
>
> There's always a demand--that ineffable type is one of the eternal needs of man's heart; only pious souls long for it in silence, almost in shame.... How should it appear in this corrupt generation? It can't be made to order.... It can spring now only from the soil of passionate labour and culture.[1]

But Europe provides not only the added dimension of a vital, artistic past. Indeed, it is part of Theobald's tragedy that he merely waited for a similar vision, lost track of time, failed to see that his Madonna model had grown ugly and coarse: he ended with a canvas of dead paint. James was aware of the danger of a superstitious valuation of Europe's past as well. But he saw the Europe of the present, too, as (at least by comparison) a "state of civilization providing for 'art'"; and he assured his readers that in Roderick Hudson he fully intended "some more or less vivid antithesis" between the shallow, commercial, nervous, busy Northampton, Massachusetts of Roderick's youth and the free, natural geist of Rome.[2] Even though Roderick, like William Wetmore Story, is not "American" enough (in James's sense, not Whitman's)

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[1] Writers and Artists, p. 27.

[2] Art of the Novel, p. 8.

to survive on the richer diet, it is in Europe that he has his short period of great achievement. Leisure and artistic freedom seem to be the conditions of art present in modern Europe but lacking in America. Rowland tells Mary Garland that he is attracted to Europe because he is an idle man, "and in Europe both the burden and the obloquy of idleness are less heavy than here."[1] And Roderick, though driven to tragedy by his incapacity for freedom, sees the complete necessity of a "long rope." "If you want them to produce you must let them conceive."[2]

Maturity of customs and forms, depth of perspective, social complexity, a visitable past--such things are needed, James felt, to stir and feed the creative imagination. And even they are not ideally sufficient: for the artist so stirred and fed must have in addition artistic freedom, intellectual stimulation,[3] naturally granted leisure, and a general feeling that his life and work are _engagée_ with society. All this demanded contact with Europe. This was an implicit indictment of American Society.

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[1]Henry James, _Roderick Hudson_ (London: Macmillan, 1921), pp. 64-65.

[2]_Ibid._, p. 196.

[3]James, before leaving America, complained of a lack of intellectual life even in Cambridge, Mass. Although he had Howells and Norton, he had little else. By contrast, his first month in London put him in contact with Sir Leslie Stephen, Aubrey de Vere, Dickens' daughter, William Morris, D. G. Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Ruskin, Frederic Harrison, George Eliot, and Darwin. _Cf._ _Notes of a Son and Brother_, pp. 438-9, and Edel, _op. cit._, pp. 292-300.

III. AMERICAN CULTURE

James was also at times a direct and explicit critic of American society and culture. Using painter, writer, and sculptor interchangeably, he used the theme of the American artist's handicap recurrently in his fiction; it was also, as we have seen, the major theme of his Hawthorne. His insight into this problem was based upon a keen interest in and knowledge of the formative role of culture in literary work. Obviously, the American writer needed Europe because his own culture was deficient. But just what was this deficiency? James himself, in his second novel, asked the same question:

> It's a wretched business, this virtual quarrel of ours with our country, this everlasting impatience to get out of it. Is one's only safety in flight? This is an American day, an American landscape, an American atmosphere. It certainly has its merits, and someday when I am shivering with ague in classic Italy I shall accuse myself of having slighted them.[1]

James could elaborate this kind of point with an energy that surprises many of his critics. He felt strongly some of the vigor of the American spirit. Look at Marcellus Cockerel, that spirited American in "The Point of View." Europe seemed to him a great deal of humbug; vastness, freshness, and simple good nature in America more than make up for the lack of cathedrals and Titians. Europe seemed to him petty, provincial, part of the past. He knows about bad manners in America, but "an aristocracy is bad

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[1] Roderick Hudson, pp. 28-29.

manners organized." And America has no peasants, "of whom it takes so many to make a European noble." "We shall have all the Titians by and by," says Cockerel, "and we shall move over a few cathedrals."[1] There is not a trace of irony or satire in James's characterization of Cockerel, either. Now, obviously, this does not represent the whole of James's view of America. But it should be just as obvious that the cultural catalogue in Hawthorne does not represent the whole of James's view of America, either. It is quite possible that he believed both of them. At least he was aware of both positions, had feelings about each, and sensed the dramatic tension between them.

Still, keeping Marcellus Cockerel and James's admirable "innocents" in mind as part of his dispassionate ambivalence, we can find the definite points at which, in James's view, American culture falls short--especially as a milieu for the arts.

There is, of course, the absence of a rich "visitable past." Even Boston is busy with "a perpetual repudiation of the past."[2] History has had time to leave only a thin deposit in America; we very soon touch "the hard substratum of nature."[3] "A large juvenility is stamped upon the face of things."[4] And how can a

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[1]Henry James, American Novels and Stories, ed. F. O. Matthiessen (New York, 1947), pp. 329-332.

[2]Henry James, The American Scene, ed. W. H. Auden (New York, 1946), p. 53.

[3]Hawthorne, p. 12. [4]Ibid., p. 14.

writer characterize and satirize a people whose shifting movements can be placed against no backdrop of traditions? For James this was a real problem, one to which his international plots became a partial solution.

The depressing, cold sterility that James often found in the American scene is also due in part, he felt, to democratic "progress" and the ideology of the New World. "It is the huge democratic broom that has made the clearance and that one seems to see brandished in the empty sky."[1] Insofar as Henry James was politically anything, he was politically liberal. He never really shook himself free of his radical background and education. But his sense of art was in conflict with this; his instincts were strongly conservative because he was for civilization, and identified civilization with certain forms, manners, and traditions which conserve it. Again, the similarity to Arnold is striking.

Art is also stunted and discouraged by a peculiar democratic-American provincialism which demands conformity, discourages anything "different," and draws sustenance from the Puritan ethos. One cannot imagine James saying of any American city what he said of Paris: "There are facilities for every kind of habit and taste, and...everything is accepted and understood."[2] James seemed to feel deeply the kind of tyranny of the majority which

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[1] The American Scene, p. 55.

[2] Letters, I, 48.

Tocqueville had analyzed forty years earlier. And majority opinion in a barren, thin, isolated culture can be quite severe. Mr. Striker, the Northampton lawyer, immediately comes to mind. In his effort to discourage Roderick from going to Rome with Rowland Mallet, he is speaking for the Hudson family--but also for Northampton and New England, and perhaps even (as Matthew Arnold thought) for America. An antique statue is to him "an image of a pagan deity, with considerable dirt sticking to it, and no arms, no nose, no clothing." It strikes him as ridiculous that one should have to spend much time in such study, and Rowland's emphasis on the need for leisure and observation grates on him. Living models, he insists, should be as good in New England as in Rome, because "the same God made us."[1] We find the same prudish, tasteless Philistinism in the wealthy American collector, Mr. Leavenworth, for whom Roderick finds it impossible to work. And although James found this kind of aesthetic indifference in Europeans as well as in Americans--the London circle in The Tragic Muse, for example--there is a difference of degree; the sacrifice of alienation which the artist must make is not nearly so deep or broad for the English painter Nick Dormer as it is for his American counterpart.

We have already discussed James's quest in Europe for greater range of subject and feeling and imaginative stimulation. He did

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[1] Roderick Hudson, pp. 51-53.

not think the American scene adequate for a full, mature literature. Roderick Hudson is still a rather comic country bumpkin when he enthusiastically spouts, early in the book, that America is good enough for him; that he is "above all an advocate for American art"; and that, by the magic of Whitman's formula, America should automatically produce the greatest art because she has the biggest men and the biggest conceptions.[1] Roderick, of course, reverses this quickly in Europe and, unlike Rowland, becomes a provincial European. More to the point is the outcry of Theobald in the dark Florentine streets against his American heritage:

> We're the disinherited of Art! We're condemned to be superficial! We're excluded from the magic circle! The soil of American perception is a poor little barren artificial deposit! Yes, we're wedded to imperfection! An American, to excel, has just ten times as much to learn as a European! We lack the deeper sense! We have neither taste nor tact nor force! How <u>should</u> we have them? Our crude and garish climate, our silent past, our deafening present, the constant pressure about us of unlovely conditions are as void of all that nourishes and prompts and inspires the artist as my sad heart is void of bitterness in saying so! We poor aspirants must live in perpetual exile.[2]

And still more to the point is the answer of the young man telling the story--James's answer to himself:

> Nothing is so idle as to talk about our want of a nursing air, of a kindly soil, of opportunity, of inspiration, of the things that help. The only thing that helps is to do something fine. There is no law in our glorious constitution against that. Invent, create, achieve.[3]

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[1] <u>Roderick Hudson</u>, pp. 28-29.

[2] <u>Stories of Writers and Artists</u>, p. 21. [3] <u>Ibid</u>.

The artist must work in spite of the lack of range given him. James surely meant this seriously, but he conveyed little hope along with such affirmation. We must remember that Theobald died leaving a hideous old canvas of dead paint; and if Hawthorne proved to the young student James that "an American could be an artist, one of the finest, without 'going outside' about it,"[1] James also knew that his very narrowness as an artist and observer saved him, kept his demands gauged to his equipment, and made Europe unnecessary for him.[2] Range and observation must either be sacrificed or be ruled out by the artist's incapacity.

One of the major strictures on art which James perceived in America--one which Whitman celebrated as a beautiful freedom--was the absence of a self-conscious intellectual class.[3] "I haven't a creature to talk to," he complained two years before leaving America:

> How in Boston, when the evening arrives and I am tired of reading, and know it would be better to do something else, can I go to the theatre? I have tried it, ad nauseum. Likewise calling. Upon whom?[4]

After the first three years of his exile, while planning a return visit to America, he wrote William that he expected to find home

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[1] Notes of a Son and Brother, pp. 383-84.

[2] Hawthorne, pp. 164 ff.

[3] Cf. Fishman, op. cit., pp. 28-29.

[4] Edel, op. cit., p. 252.

"painfully and obstructively" uncongenial to literary work; what it needs is "a regal of intelligent and suggestive society."[1] Such a society is, of course, a major preoccupation in most of James's novels. He did not regard it as merely a great comfort to the writer; though it would surely be that, it was also a necessity. A writer, said James, has a definite need for "the comfort and inspiration of belonging to a class." The best talents are always those which are part of a group, a class; the solitary worker, the Hawthorne, is under a great handicap, and must encounter far more pain in working.[2] Indeed, Hawthorne is always an exception for James for precisely the same reason: he could even survive poor intellectual surroundings, because he was by nature a recluse with the strict limitations of an observer who asked little of his milieu.[3] The normal artist--the artist in The Lesson of the Master, The Tragic Muse, The Middle Years--cannot be conceived separated from such a group.

It is only to be expected that James would feel some hostility towards the predominant commercialism of American society. He noted with dismay the difficulty of launching a career not of the "practical order" and the awkwardness of "not belonging" in such a society.[4] He stated the donnée of his American Scene as

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[1] Letters, I, pp. 38-40.

[2] Hawthorne, p. 31.

[3] Ibid., pp. 28-29.

[4] Ibid., pp. 30-31.

> The great adventure of a society reaching out into the apparent void for the amenities, the consummations, after having so earnestly gathered in the preparations and necessities.[1]

In the same book he criticized the wealthy classes in America for affirming their wealth without affirming anything else, for "having nothing to do with continuity, responsibility, transmission...."[2] Striker may again be used to stand for the commerce-driven middle-class American, for he describes himself as

> a practical old boy, content to follow an honorable profession in a free country. I didn't go to any part of Europe to learn my business; no one took me by the hand....[3]

If James occasionally fell into near-clichés, in the manner of Martin Chuzzlewit, in these characterizations, he could also be serious; he could also create a Mary Garland, and put her sweet New England innocence in the richness of Rome until she finds that beauty

> penetrates to one's soul and lodges there and keeps saying that man wasn't made, as we think at home, to struggle so much and miss so much...[4]

But in total effect James was quite mild as a critic of commercialism. R. P. Blackmur is right in noting that James had some of Tocqueville's awareness of the problem of the "trade of literature"; but he is also right in noting that this was, for James, secondary to the more universal issues confronting the

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[1] The American Scene, p. 12. [2] Ibid., p. 11.

[3] Roderick Hudson, p. 54. [4] Ibid., p. 401.

individual and the artist.[1] He preferred, like his own Christopher Newman in The American, to leave commerce quite behind and seek a thinner, finer atmosphere. James Whistler's leaving his family's vast railroad interests comes to mind as a parallel.

James was not really very optimistic about the chances for literature in democratic American society. But he was not entirely pessimistic, either. Critics in the twenties assumed that James's Hawthorne was little more than an attempt to document the theory that the artist in America is doomed. But James's diagnosis of Hawthorne did not lead him to this conclusion. He was not blinded to some of the advantages given the American artist. He expected, for example, an unnatural degree of devotion to great art; the young narrator in The Madonna of the Future has no trouble in recognizing Theobald as an American, for "the very heat of his worship was a mark of conversion."[2] But this advantage too easily becomes a snare; Theobald, lacking the ease and skill which are born of time, dies in disappointment, tragically searching for his "other half"; and Story, too, James reminds us, was a devout worshiper of art. Intensity of devotion is not enough.

The American artist is not doomed to failure, but he is doomed by his "complex fate" as an American to hard work. The

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[1] R. P. Blackmur, "In the Country of the Blue," in F. W. Dupee, The Question of Henry James, pp. 202-221.

[2] Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 29.

absence of a visitable past, of a tolerant social attitude towards art, and of a self-conscious intellectual class is a real barrier. The barrier is raised higher by other factors: the Puritan heritage, commercialism, the demand for rigid social conformity, the lack of social complexity, the lack of range and of interesting subject-matter.[1] James quietly but flatly rejected the complacent optimism of Whitman. The occasional "sports" in American art, like Hawthorne, who was sprung "out of the Salem puddles, flower-like,"[2] too often will not have the strength or nourishment to blossom fully and to endure. The cultural medium in America is too thin to cultivate the arts easily and naturally. But "deep, dark old Europe" can do much to save the American artist--if he is not beguiled and overwhelmed by her, if he can "use" her with the innocent detachment and disinterestedness that only an American can achieve.

American art--distinctive American art--is not impossible. But it must be tailored to the many deficiencies and the few great advantages that America offers her artists.

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[1]James's fears about the thinness of subject-matter in America can be found not only in his letters and his more important critical studies, but also in some of his early reviews of American novels. Reviewing Bayard Taylor's tragedy of Mormonism, The Prophet, James commended the author for having "secured for a hero a veritable prophet, with the bloom not yet rubbed off by literature." But Taylor was scraping the bottom of the barrel. "It is very well to wish to poetize common things, but...one must choose. There are things inherently vulgar... Mormonism is one of these." [North American Review, CXXX (Jan., 1875), 189, 193.]

[2]Hawthorne, p. 40. Cf. also Roderick Hudson, p. 17.

IV. WRITER AND PUBLIC

Whitman, combining the bardic tradition with democratic (almost Tupper-like) sentiment, thought of the writer as a representative of the people. He looked with eagerness towards "democratic art." Here too, Whitman and James are at loggerheads. For James, art was art--an intensely serious thing with its own eternal standards. Although his early reviews in the Nation and the North American Review (1864-66) show a deep concern for the reader of fiction and decree that for this reason everything must be credible and the novelist must convey and reveal rather than describe,[1] and although he tried to win a wider audience with such attempts as the drama and the "pattern in the carpet" prefaces to the New York edition,[2] he refused to be circumscribed by public taste. Nick Dormer, having resigned his seat in Parliament (and a considerable fortune) for art, tells Gabriel Nash: "You rescued me; you converted me from a representative into an example--that's a shade better."[3] For Henry James, in the confines of the world of art, there was more than a shade of difference.

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[1]Edel, op. cit., pp. 214-215.

[2]These prefaces are in reality a protest against inattentive reading; their performance brings Hugh Verecker of The Pattern in the Carpet close to the realm of autobiography. Cf. Leon Edel, The Prefaces of Henry James (Paris, 1931), pp. 13-16.

[3]Henry James, The Tragic Muse (London, 1921), II, 353.

In fact, James could show at times an actual disgust for the notion of a popular culture. Gabriel Nash's description of a modern audience--too lengthy to quote in full--is a small classic in its kind:

> ...the omnium gatherum of the population of a big commercial city at the hour of the day when their taste is at its lowest, flocking out of hideous hotels and restaurants, gorged with food, stultified with buying and selling and with all the other sordid preoccupations of the age, squeezed together in a sweltering mass, disappointed in their seats, timing the author, timing the actor, wishing to get their money back on the spot--all before eleven o'clock. Fancy putting the exquisite before such a tribunal as that![1]

Mark Ambient, the tragic writer of The Author of Beltraffio whose story was suggested to James by incidents in the life of Symonds, is ruined by the standards of such an audience as they are expressed by his own wife. His scorn passes around and beneath her to a general condition:

> There's a hatred of art, there's a hatred of literature--I mean of the genuine kinds. Oh the shams--those they'll swallow by the bucket![2]

Like Mark Ambient, Neil Paraday (the writer in The Death of the Lion) is driven to destruction by his audience. Their superficial and unenlightened adulation harms as much as does any scorn, for they keep him from his work, put him on exhibition, and finally leave him to die in the guest-room of his patroness's home while

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[1]The Tragic Muse, I, 58-59.

[2]Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 78.

they switch their attention in the spacious rooms below to a pair of rival literary sex-mongers, each of whom writes as a member of his opposite sex. And James reached the height of disgust, rather surprisingly, in The Madonna of the Future, that gripping tale which seems bent on pointing a very different moral, viz., the futility of so idealizing art that it cannot be brought to actual life. But James, in this tale, pointed to an even worse fate in the opposite extreme, the extreme of cynical talent at work without an ideal, with nothing to stir it but a consuming public. His symbol is the vulgar Italian contriver of obscene cat-and-monkey figurines, and with him he succeeds in casting over the whole tale the suggestion of what Matthiessen has called "the horror of spiritual death."

James does not, however, allow this question of mass culture to draw him too far from his primary concern with the creation of art. His dealings with the question are more frequently light than tragic, and often serve to remind us, as Constance Rourke has done in her essay on The American,[1] that James had exquisite powers as a humorist. His Greville Fane is a piece of pretty fencing showing a surprising warmth and love for a simply deluded woman novelist who churns out scores of emotional, slick, sensational books of great popularity while suffering the jeers and the condescension of her worthless children--a snobbish daughter

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[1]The essay is re-printed in F. W. Dupee, The Question of Henry James.

and a perverse son. But the masterpiece of this school is The Next Time--a swift-moving leg-pull with flashes of brilliant narrative humor. In this tale a promising young novelist, Ray Limbert, struggles heroically to make sufficient money to allow him to marry. His books have been acclaimed, but do not sell. Meanwhile his sister-in-law, Jane Highmore, having acquired a small fortune by writing eighty pot-boilers, "yearned to be, like Limbert, but of course only once, an exquisite failure."[1] Limbert works furiously at writing down to the public:

> I must cultivate the market--it's a science like another; I must go in for an infernal cunning.... I haven't been obvious--I must be obvious. I haven't been popular--I must be popular.[2]

But he simply cannot write poorly enough; with the help of his friends he desperately seeks to know "why the note he strained every chord to pitch for common ears should invariably insist upon addressing itself to the angels."[3] He is discharged from the editorship of a new magazine--not for diabolically creating a market for his "changed manner" by means of a cheaply popular serial at the publisher's expense, but for being (in the publisher's estimation) still too highbrow. With amusing persistence he moves his sights still lower; when the book comes out, his friends are astonished: it is "an unscrupulous, an unsparing, a shameless merciless masterpiece"[4]--which of course defeats his purpose.

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[1] Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 245.

[2] Ibid., p. 262. [3] Ibid., p. 276. [4] Ibid., p. 266.

His friends continue to encourage him, meanwhile taking secret solace in the fact that he is writing brilliant books. Jane Highmore's attempt goes dead ("How can there be anything but the same old faithful rush for it?"[1] comments the narrator); Ray Limbert, poor and sick, a "failure," loses the memory of the ordeal and at the end writes (without finishing) a book as he wishes to write; and the narrator points the nicely inverted moral: "You can't make a sow's ear of a silk purse! ... It takes more than trying--it comes by grace."[2]

James used, then, both comedy and tragedy to express his feelings about popular culture and its bearing on art. At first glance it is surprising that he did not have more to say. There are very few personal utterances in the letters and notebooks directed against mass culture[3]--perhaps fewer than can be found in Whitman. But this is not quite so surprising if we remember James's high valuation of the creative life as a life of detachment, devotion, dedication to ideal beauty. To such a writer the reading public can scarcely matter; his omission of interest is in itself a condemnation of mass standards of judgment.

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[1] Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 247.

[2] Ibid., p. 272.

[3] But Cf. his complaint to Howells about "trying to write anything decent or serious for a public so absolutely idiotic"; and his assertion to William that "one has always a 'public' enough if one has an audible vibration--even if it should only come from one's self." (Letters, I, 104-5, 175.)

V. THE RELIGIOUS PRACTICE OF ART

James did not share Whitman's views on mass culture because he did not share his views on art. While both of them were "realists," they meant quite different things by "realism." Whitman was an advocate of passionate association of the artist with his scene; but James was an advocate of objective study and creation, of dispassionate separation from his scene. Neither of them saw art as the mere celebration of life, but Whitman created a reality by symbolic identity with his materials; James, on the other hand, molded his creation out of a particular point of view. Dencombe, the old writer in The Middle Years, tells the young doctor who has become his "first and only chance,"

> We work in the dark--we do what we can--we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art.[1]

The artist was, for James, completely dedicated--dedicated not to society but to art, to beauty.

> To live in the world of creation--to get into it and stay in it--to frequent it and haunt it--to think intensely and fruitfully--to wish combinations and inspirations into being...--this is the only thing.[2]

The artist's dedication makes of him, as Blackmur says, the man (saints excepted) most totally deprived. James's portrait of him is always the portrait of a failure: for otherwise it would

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[1] Writers and Artists, p. 210.

[2] Henry James, Notebooks, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and K. Murdock (New York, 1947), p. x.

merely be that of a man.[1]

This separation of art and life ("life" naturalistically defined) was anathema to Whitman and creed to James. This is not to say that James thought it ideal; he thought it, rather, an almost intolerable situation. In a better age--the great age of Florence as imagined by Theobald, for example--the dichotomy would not exist. But he seemed to regard it as a perceptible fact that life had exiled beauty clean out of it, making necessary its religious pursuit by the devout artist. The awareness of this fact made him, in his fiction, much more than an historian of manners; he was also "a trenchant idealistic critic of life from the aesthetic point of view."[2] The contention between him and Whitman is in part the conflict between a dualistic aesthetic idealism and a monistic pantheism. Whitman found nothing more beautiful than his own body and the green grass; James had to look beyond the actual, like his own Mark Ambient:

> My dear fellow, if you could see the surface I dream of as compared with the one with which I've to content myself. Life's really too short for art--one hasn't time to make one's shell ideally hard.[3]

The entire gallery of artists in James's fiction are marked with this devotion to art--and they all find it necessary to sacrifice

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[1] Blackmur, op. cit., p. 220.

[2] Stuart P. Sherman, "The Aesthetic Idealism of Henry James," in F. W. Dupee (ed.), The Question of Henry James, p. 105.

[3] Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 76.

something of life. They must work--as Mark Ambient saw too late--alone. They must work, not to please, but to capture the idea: poor Theobald, despite his tragic delusion, is a consistent Jamesian artist when he proves his conscientiousness with the statement, "I've never sold a picture!"[1] Neil Paraday (The Death of the Lion) is doomed from the moment life becomes mixed up with art. In The Lesson of the Master, the cruel lesson is obvious from the beginning. When Paul Overt objects,

> What a false position, what a condemnation of the artist, that he's a mere disenfranchised monk and can produce his effect only by giving up personal happiness. What an arraignment of art!

the Master, "the great misguided novelist," Henry St. George, can only answer:

> Ah, you don't imagine by chance that I'm defending art? 'Arraignment'--I should think so! ... Most assuredly is the artist in a false position![2]

James put most of his artists through the great temptation: he had them confronted with life, and faced with the cruel necessity of choosing between it and art. Even Rowland, who is used mainly as Roderick's go-between, seeking the narrow ridge between, is tempted during his own task of bringing Roderick to the thin, beautiful world of art. As he walks through moonlit Northampton, Massachusetts he feels he

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[1] Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 24.

[2] Ibid., p. 140.

> could almost have believed that the happiest lot for any man was to make the most of life in some such tranquil spot as that. Here were kindness, comfort, safety, the warning voice of duty, the perfect absence of temptation....[1]

The temptation, the problem, the very dualism cannot be understood by those whose thought and art represent the other half of the great American dialogue, those who are celebrants of a new life in a New World. Nor could its intensity always be understood by conservative Europeans, still accustomed to thinking of art and life as of one piece.

VI. ART AND CRAFT

There is a final point upon which these two traditions represented by Whitman and James stand far apart: it can be denominated the conscious concern with the craft of literature.

Whitman, in his rejection of all that was feudal, conventional, artificial, and "unnatural," and in his eagerness to blaze a new trail for a completely new literature, hoped to make all questions of "style" and "form" irrelevant and obsolete. If this is "typically American," it is only half of the picture: for as Matthiessen has pointed out, the opposite is also typical. Writers like Poe and James and Eliot have reacted to this neglect with an almost compulsive obsession for form.

James McNeil Whistler, that other great American exile of

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[1] Roderick Hudson, p. 58.

the latter part of the nineteenth century, is an interesting parallel to James. In flight from the same America, driven by the same hunger (though satisfying it in a more Bohemian manner), insisting that "there is no nationality in painting" and that art must "appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, such as devotion, pity, love, patriotism, and the like,"[1] Whistler's concern is with harmony, design, form. Whistler, who claimed "no nationality," and who vigorously attacked the aestheticism of his English contemporaries in The Gentle Art of Making Enemies, was really giving strong utterance to the aesthetic and conservative side of the distinctly American dialogue:

> My picture of a Harmony in Grey and Gold is an illustration of my meaning--a snow scene with a single black figure and a lighted tavern. I care nothing for the past, present or future of the black figure, placed there because the black was wanted at that spot. All that I know is that my combination of grey and gold is the basis of the picture. Now this is precisely what my friends cannot grasp. They say, "Why not call it 'Trotty Veck,' and sell it for a round harmony of golden guineas?"[2]

It sounds like something out of the fiction of Henry James.

James grew into the concern for craft very early. At twenty-one, when he was writing reviews for the North American Review, he was

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[1]Quoted by Matthew Josephson, Portrait of the Artist as an American, p. 60.

[2]Quoted by Joseph Pennell and Elizabeth Pennell, The Life of James McNeil Whistler (Philadelphia, 1911), p. 116.

> approaching fiction more consciously and with greater deliberation than any American novelist before him; the need to put the house of fiction in order and the need for precept, canon, codification, is there and clearly in evidence. Later it was to be expressed in a series of tales about misunderstood writers, all of them groping for an ideal world, a great good place in which art could flourish....[1]

Part of James's concern had still deeper roots. He was interested, throughout his life, in the whole problem of appearance versus reality. For an American, this was natural; for America is built largely upon the "American dream" in a way in which no other society is built upon a dream. But the problem for the artist is acute, and becomes a technical problem--unless he is content, like Whitman, to super-impose the dream upon the actual. James rejected this; but, as his notebooks clearly demonstrate, he could at first perceive no more of that which lies beneath appearance than any of us. His notebooks, says Matthiessen, give us nothing but "a picture of the empty social world of the tourist."[2] To mold such simple realistic observation into great literature requires the utmost literary skill. He had to be a craftsman in order to bridge the gap between what Matthiessen calls the "apparent emptiness of experience and what he could make of it."[3] Mr. V. S. Pritchett, in an unpublished play on

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[1]Edel, The Untried Years, p. 204.

[2]F. O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (New York, 1946), p. 2.

[3]Ibid., p. 4.

James,[1] notes a similar oddity: James is concerned, not with experience, but with the result, the effect of experience. Art and life are separate--even for a realist. The artist must transform, re-create; he cannot simply copy. This is the point of James's The Real Thing: Major and Mrs. Monarch, serving as artist's models, can offer "the real thing" in ladies and gentlemen; but the artist's work becomes stiff; the real thing is less precious than the unreal;[2] the cockney girl and the Italian servant-boy, who pose as gentry, inspire him as the "real thing" cannot. It is technique, craft that defines art.

James's demand and need for conscious craft can be thus accounted for. That he was, indeed, a great craftsman cannot and need not here be proved. He required, mainly, the power of evoking the tone of things instead of describing them in discursive language. It is generally agreed--especially among the admiring poets of our own day--that he succeeded.[3]

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[1]Broadcast on the B.B.C. Third Programme on January 22, 1956.

[2]Stories of Writers and Artists, p. 191.

[3]O'Connor, op. cit., pp. 95-97.

PART IV:

Victorians and the Orientation of American Literature

CHAPTER NINE

VICTORIAN PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE

What kind of mind was it that, beginning at mid-century, tried to judge American culture while American literature struggled to be born?

This question has been answered with frequency, at great length, in many ways by many writers, with at least some degree of unanimity. The major characteristics of the mind and the age are already well enough known. This short chapter sets out only to fill in details which are sometimes overlooked, especially as they reveal the Victorian mind in relation to America and to the questions about culture which America must have suggested to the nineteenth century. A fuller picture of the Victorian mind will unfold in the following chapters--for a major purpose of this dissertation is to shed light on Victorian criticism.

For one thing, the Victorian mind was a mind of quality, a mind of intellectual worth. Historian G. M. Young tells us that he has won the consent of the Sorbonne to the statement that there are two great ages of human intellect--the age of Pericles and the age of Victoria. This in spite of the many reminders we have of its excessive shoddiness and mediocrity. The sheer expansiveness of intellect, the scope of its activity, may have had as much to do with this as did cultural maturity. George

Saintsbury made some such point about the literary criticism of the age. "Although there certainly has been more bad criticism written in the nineteenth century than in any previous one,--probably more than in all previous centuries put together," he wrote, "it is quite certain that no period can show so much that is good."[1]

I.

That the Victorian age was an age of political, social, philosophical, and religious upheaval is obvious enough. What may not be so obvious is the fact that this constant stirring of the waters set Britons to looking not only behind and ahead, to past and future, but also, like their American cousins, to looking in two directions, East and West. Through all the turbulent internal change, many a mind sought stability from the continent. Except for Carlyle and the transcendentalists, who looked to Germany, the European point of focus was generally France. But Matthew Arnold, for one, seems to have been deliberately attempting to divert the gaze of his countryman from America to France;[2] and Charles Kingsley, we learn from his letters,[3] advocated the

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[1]George Saintsbury, A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1949), III, p. 421.

[2]See below, p. 176.

[3]Letters and Memoirs (London, 1887), II, 134, 228-9. Cf. also F. W. Maitland, The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen (London, 1906), 175-7.

founding at Cambridge of a lectureship on the United States only because he thought it might help to ward off growing "Americanization." Many of the Victorians, living in an age of change and reform and "progress" and fat promise, turned their eyes hopefully or apprehensively towards the West and the new world. So something of the same bifurcation of society which marked America was setting in in England; there, too, men stood uncertainly and looked both East and West.

This is perhaps not so obvious partly because we have become accustomed to thinking of the Victorian age, especially after 1850, in terms of such words as democracy, science, optimism, progress, and so forth. But, as Walter E. Houghton has recently shown in his The Victorian Frame of Mind,[1] for the Victorians themselves the key word was transition. They felt that their age marked some kind of significant change from past to future. Transition, of course, suggests uncertainty and re-examination. It is the important word especially for Arnold, John Stuart Mill, and Bulwer Lytton; but the same word is used to characterize the age by Prince Albert, Carlyle, Disraeli, Frederic Harrison, Harriet Martineau, John Morley, William Morris, Herbert Spencer, John Addington Symonds, and Tennyson.

That sense of transition gave to the Victorian mind its characteristic multiplicity and variety--a multiplicity and

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[1] New Haven, 1957.

variety which is reflected alike in Victorian customs, in literary style, in Victorian beliefs. It is an age of heterogeneity. But the Victorians themselves are our best reminders that societies are not content with unrest, with a sense of transition, with multiplicity and heterogeneity. The impulse towards settled belief, towards an homogenous society, was hard at work, moving minds and men as different as Macaulay, Carlyle, Bright, Frederic Harrison, and Arnold. And because the transition was in part a transition towards liberal democracy and its vaguely defined institutions, it was inevitable that the Victorians should study America. English and European culture had always been divided into aristocratic culture and folk culture; the United States, as Arnold pointed out, skipped the aristocratic. Its culture was naturally homogenous. Whether with mockery or respect or fear or longing or simple studious interest, the Victorians looked at American homogeneity as an alternative to their own unsettled, shifting, heterogeneous society.

Then too, the English knew, as Tocqueville knew, that the democratic experiment had gone further in America than anywhere in Europe. Whatever one's hopes or fears about democracy and the future might be, he had to reckon with the United States. Tocqueville was speaking not just for himself but for European thought when he noted that in Europe

> the democratic revolution has been effected only in the material parts of society, without the concomitant change in laws, ideas, customs, and manners.... We have obtained a democracy [in France], but without

> the conditions which lessen its vices and render its natural advantages more prominent; and although we already perceive the evils it brings, we are ignorant of the benefits it may confer.[1]

This was of greater concern to the English than to anyone else; after all, the culture of growing America was a direct off-shoot of a native British liberal tradition. It is not at all unfair to say that America was shaped essentially by Locke, Adam Smith, Blackstone, Newton, and Thomas Paine.[2] Now the strange bird, bred in England, was coming home to roost. In the political and cultural unrest and turmoil of the Victorian age, it was not likely that this would be forgotten. British intellectuals of all parties felt that they could gauge the British future, the cultural future as well as the political future, by getting to know and to understand America. John Bright, writing to Motley in 1863,[3] expresses the feeling well:

> The argument could not be avoided, if Englishmen west of the Atlantic could prosper without crown, without Lords, without Church, without a great territorial class with feudal privileges...how long will Englishmen in England continue to think these things necessary for them?

So, with apprehensive horror or with utopian hope, the

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[1] Democracy in America, p. 8.

[2] "Among the writings of English and continental thinkers who helped give shape to American culture, none have been more pivotal than those of Sir Isaac Newton, John Locke, Charles de Secondat de Montisquieu, Sir William Blackstone, and Adam Smith." R. E. Spiller, et al., Lit. Hist. United States, III, 94.

[3] John L. Motley, Correspondence, ed. B. W. Curtis (New York, 1889), II, 120.

Victorians attempted their estimates of their own strange, wild offspring in America. The seriousness of their interest is reflected partly in the increasing number of articles on America and reviews of American books towards the end of the century. But because they too were in search of orientation and were torn between an institutionalized past and a vague future, we must not expect an abundance of objectivity in their estimates. They were standing outside the picture, so to speak, and could see it as a whole; undoubtedly they could recognize the split character of American culture more readily than the Americans could; but they were seldom disinterested, mildly curious spectators. Partisan feeling often ran strong, as we shall see, and this often limited the value of the assessments made of Whitman, James, or the American scene in general.

II.

What kinds of theories of literature were in the Victorian mind as it read the Americans? Again, the Victorians were not unprepared for the problems characteristic of American literature at this time. The same forces and movements were operating in each country. Indeed, the realistic movement (to take one example) was working its way through the whole of Western civilization, and through all of the arts. Courbet's first exhibition was in 1855, the year of Whitman's Leaves of Grass: and it was Courbet who said, "Faire des vers, c'est malhonnet; parler

autrement que tout le monde, c'est poser pour l'aristocrate."[1] Flaubert's Madame Bovary appeared in the following year.

Not only realism, but also naturalism, socio-realistic propagandism, the art-for-art's-sake reaction to didacticism--all these are ingredients of the nineteenth century as a whole, Victorian Britain outstandingly included. Each theory seemed to agree that literature was at least some kind of expression. Already in the previous century the German romanticists had introduced the idea that literature should be an expression of the national spirit, symbolizing the inner life of a nation. The idea developed most rapidly in Russia (Belinsky and Chernyshevsky demanding the social relevance of literature, and Dimitri Pisarev reducing aesthetics to psychology and hygiene--"every healthy and normal person is beautiful");[2] but it soon became part of Victorianism as well, and, under the surveillance of the newly powerful middle classes, fostered a view of literature which was anti-aesthetic and didactic, and which insisted that art is personal expression.

The influence of Sainte-Beuve on the Victorians must not be overlooked. It is under his influence that expression came to mean self-expression, personal revelation. Imagine the critical

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[1]Emile Gros-Kost, Courbet, Souvenirs Intimes (Paris: Derveaux, 1880), p. 31.

[2]William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History (New York, 1957), p. 461.

standards of the following paragraph (F. J. Furnivall, discussing Browning's Introductory Essay to the Shelley letters) being applied to the novels of Henry James:

> The interest lay in the fact that Browning's utterances here are his, and not those of any one of the "so many imaginary persons," behind whom he so often insists on hiding himself, and whose necks I, for one, should continually like to wring, whose bodies I would fain kick out of the way, in order to get face to face with the poet himself, and hear his own voice speaking his own thoughts, man to man, soul to soul. Straight speaking, straight hitting, suit me best.[1]

Of equal importance is the conviction, fairly current in Victorian society, that literature, if it be genuine, will and must get its message across to the ordinary reader. It is the age of Tupper as well as of Browning's Sordello. This too is part of the nineteenth century. Tolstoy, when he tells us that art is for "a country peasant of unperverted taste,"[2] sounds very much like Whitman or Robert Buchanan. It is all part of the westward gaze, the new age of the ordinary man. And this attitude goes on to insist, of course, that literature be didactic. "All great art and literature," wrote Bernard Shaw, "is propaganda." Tolstoy's didactic criticism of Shakespeare--

> the lowest, most vulgar view of life, which despises the crowd, that is to say, the working classes; and

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[1] Browning Society Papers (London, 1881), no. 1.

[2] Leo Tolstoy, What is Art? (London, 1932), p. 221. In chapter XII Tolstoy sweeps away almost the whole tradition of Western art, including Dante, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, and Bach.

> repudiates not only religious, but even any humanitarian, efforts directed toward the alteration of the existing order of society[1] --

has numerous parallels in Victorian criticism, as we shall see. It all sounds American, and in a sense it is; but it is also part of the mind of the Victorians and of the Europeans in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The demands of a large, powerful, newly-educated middle class audience left a deep imprint on Victorian literary criticism. Utilitarianism was openly hostile to literature, equating, as Bentham had, poetry with push-pin; the middle classes demanded usefulness, and in most literature they found none. Evangelicalism was likewise hostile. Often the only salvation of literature, outside of narrowly utilitarian or evangelical didacticism, lay in the theory that the writer's legitimate function was that of a prophet. Carlyle had pronounced the idea forcefully in his On Heroes; if it was not already a popular theory when Carlyle defended it, it soon became one. It was one answer to Macaulay's complacent observation in his essay on Milton that language in a middle class society would become more general, that we would have from now on "better theories and worse poems." The poet could survive by taking up his old mantle as a bard, enunciating but also elevating and purifying public opinion. Walt Whitman in America is an obvious manifestation of this middle class return

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[1] Leo Tolstoy, "Shakespeare and the Drama," in A. Maude, ed., Tolstoy on Art (Boston, 1924), p. 437.

to the old bardic tradition. The Victorian public and a number of Victorian critics insisted upon this prophetic role of the writer. The result was that much poetry and fiction and essay in the age became bardic in tone and purpose; but there was another result: the wedge between writer and public was driven in deeper, and art was forced to various degrees of isolation. While Arnold was expressing the romantic loneliness of "Empedocles on Etna" and the spiritual aridity of "Dover Beach," while Browning was probing individual motive and the lover or artist who cannot communicate, while even Tennyson was preoccupied with doubt and with themes of betrayal and separation, the public and many of the critics went on clamoring for writers who would inspire the people by chanting mightily the values and the optimism of the new race.

Such binding of the artist to the middle classes (or in some cases to the masses) and to utilitarian purpose had another result: an art-for-art's sake school which plays its part in the complex of Victorian criticism. Art had always been, in some sense, for its own sake; but the nineteenth century characteristically questioned and modified this; the didacticism and utilitarianism of the age unintentionally hurried along the aesthetic movement as a reaction. Oscar Wilde became the right counter to Leo Tolstoy: Wilde complained of "the overimportance assigned to character," uncouthness and vulgarity, and "realism," in the plays of Shakespeare.[1]

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[1]Oscar Wilde, Intentions (New York, 1894), p. 21.

This survey of the forces at work in Victorian literature and Victorian criticism suggests certain expectations. The poetic theories which sought personal revelation and social teaching in literature would, of course, tend to favor the Redskin movement in America. To a lesser degree, and for different reasons, the rhapsodic-spasmodic school of criticism (Carlyle usually comes first to mind) would have natural inclinations towards the same movement. But there were also cultural conservatives--it is tempting to say cultural conservationists--who feared that too much of the cultural tradition was being sacrificed. By nature these conservatives were suspicious of Whitman; by nature neo-classical idealists like Arnold would hope for the success of the "Europhile" movement in America; and by nature the aesthetic critics would embrace Henry James and examine Whitman cautiously, trying to separate the daring artist from bardic mask. But the point is, Whitman and James and the whole problem of American cultural orientation fit significantly into the context of Victorian criticism.

III.

One final comment on the Victorian mind: it had a clear advantage for understanding the implications of the American problem. Drawn to America as a profitable subject, a subject that should have aided them in seeing themselves and their culture more clearly, Victorian men of letters were still intimately in touch with an older civilization. They could easily assume a position

halfway between East and West. They knew better than the Americans what it meant to have a tradition--and therefore something of what it meant to overthrow one. They understood more clearly the meaning of the nineteenth century conflict between old and new sets of values--because they were closer to the old ones. They had rich materials for the discussion of the conditions necessary to the growth of literature.

In summary, these are the significant, and sometimes overlooked, characteristics of the Victorians from mid-century on: intellectual vigor, a recognition of their age as an age of transition, an impatience with their own heterogeneity, a tendency to look to either the British past, the continent, or the New World for guidance into the future, a feeling that they had something at stake in the fate of American culture and American affairs, and an intellectual and literary atmosphere which was analogous enough to afford understanding of American forces and ideas, and yet was distinct enough in depth and complexity to shed significant light upon them.

CHAPTER TEN

IN GENERAL: WHITMAN AND JAMES IN BRITAIN

I.

Whitman's avant garde exploration of a new liberal bent for literature to match the social and scientific progress of the modern world aroused little comment in his own country--simply because Whitman in general was largely ignored. It was in Britain that he was first taken seriously; it was here that his ideas about literature and society met their first and only test in the nineteenth century.

The sheer bulk of the attention paid him in Britain is itself astounding. There can be no argument with John Addington Symonds' statement, a year after Whitman's death, that "Hitherto he has won more respect from persons of culture in Great Britain than from the divine average of the States."[1] And Whitman was quite aware of his Old World audience. As early as 1862, he wrote the following to his unofficial London agent, Moncure Conway:

> Indeed, my dear friend, I may here confess to you that to be accepted by these young men of England, and treated with highest courtesy and even honor, touches me deeply. In my own country, so far--from the press, and from authoritative quarters, I have

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[1]John Addington Symonds, Walt Whitman: A Study (London, 1893), p. 124.

> received but one long tirade of impudence, mockery, and scurrilous jeers. Only since the English recognition have the skies here lighted up a little.[1]

The history of the affair is spectacular enough to have merited at least one full-length study, that of Professor Harold Blodgett. Among Whitman's defenders in Britain can be found such names as W. M. Rossetti, Swinburne, Robert Louis Stevenson, J. A. Symonds, Edward Dowden, George Saintsbury, Professor Nettleship, and Robert Buchanan. Some of these, and others, collected almost £ 160 for Whitman's support in 1886.[2] His fame had its curious facets--such as the formation of a "Labour church" in Birmingham, having for its service readings from Walt Whitman, alternating with hymns and the Lord's Prayer.[3] W. M. Rossetti and Ann Gilchrist seriously debated by correspondence whether Whitman might not be "far more closely akin to Christ than to either Homer or Shakespeare"; and they agreed that these four names must certainly be grouped together.[4] Symonds placed Leaves of Grass above the writings of Plato and Goethe.[5] Even the hostile Saturday Review had to admit Whitman's importance, and felt constrained to devote six articles to him in his own lifetime.

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[1] CPSP, pp. 969-970.

[2] W. M. Rossetti, Letters...Concerning Whitman, Blake, and Shelley, ed. by Clarence Gohdes and P. F. Baum (Durham, 1934), Appendix B, p. 185.

[3] Blodgett, op. cit., p. 4.

[4] W. M. Rossetti, op. cit., pp. 63-64.

[5] Blodgett, op. cit., p. 1.

W. M. Rossetti and Robert Buchanan--who had little else in common--each sent a letter to President Grover Cleveland, pleading that Whitman be given a government pension.[1]

But some of the criticism in Britain was severe, especially in the earlier years. Sir Henry Maine, writing in the Saturday Review, vigorously attacked the 1855 edition and suggested that anyone who might happen to come into possession of a copy would do well to burn it.[2] Swinburne, who was initially one of the warmest of Whitman's admirers, later turned on him one of his hottest streams of invective in an essay called "Whitmania."[3] The Literary Gazette called Whitman of all writers "the most silly, the most blasphemous, and the most disquieting."[4] Professor Gohdes has found that, of ten anthologies of poetry appearing between 1863 and 1892 which included American authors, only two contain selections from Whitman.[5]

The point is not that Whitman was universally damned or praised; it is rather that he was widely discussed.

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[1]Buchanan's letter is preserved in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Both letters are re-printed in Appendix A, W. M. Rossetti, op. cit., pp. 181-183.

[2]Saturday Review, I (March 15, 1856), 394.

[3]This piece first appeared in the Fortnightly Review in 1887. Swinburne later included it in his Studies in Prose and Poetry (London, 1894).

[4]Literary Gazette, V (July 7, 1860), 799.

[5]Clarence Gohdes, American Literature in Nineteenth Century England, p. 137.

The reasons for Whitman's comparative neglect in America are not perfectly clear, and need not be examined in detail. Much of it was due, of course, to the inertia of conventional literary taste. W. M. Rossetti, for one, complained of this.[1] A rigid brand of Yankee morality was also against Whitman. These two forces, convention and moral code, were far more strict in America than in Britain. (Indeed, it was partly to escape them that Henry James had come to Europe; their presence was often pointed to as illustrating the advantage of having a leisure class.)

The American poet Sidney Lanier[2] made an objection to Whitman which is more to the point for the present study: he saw no significant future for society and art if Whitman were to be followed. He found Whitman "the most stupendously mistaken man in all history as to what constitutes true democracy, and the true advance of art and man."[3] Lanier also found in Whitman a lack of

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[1]Rossetti wrote to Charles Aldrich: "In the English editions my book (a selection of Whitman, introduced by Rossetti) concludes with a sentence saying that not Longfellow but Whitman is properly the national poet of America.... When the publishers in 1878 treated with American houses to circulate an American edition of my book, they found that no American would do so as long as that sentence stood in print.... I believe that all copies sold in America omit that final sentence, while all copies sold in England retain it." (W. M. Rossetti, op. cit., p. 186.)

[2]Lanier was dismissed by the Whitman circle as "one of the literati." Whitman's friend and biographer, William O'Connor, refers, e.g., to "poor Lanier's silly lectures." (Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, IV, 393.)

[3]Quoted by C. W. Moulton, op. cit., VIII, 141.

genuineness;[1] and Thomas Wentworth Higginson,[2] George Santayana,[3] and G. E. Woodbury[4] spoke of him as a fake--a fake of the sort that foreigners would not detect but that his own countrymen do detect. The British, they argued, have simply been taken in by a kind of Yankee bluster which they could not be expected to know. Theodore Watts-Dunton, who "hated Whitman most heartily" according to Gosse,[5] made a similar observation. If Whitman had been an Englishman, Watts-Dunton wrote in an obituary, "he would have

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[1]"Professing to be a mudsill and glorying in it, chanting democracy and shirtsleeves and equal rights, declaring that he is nothing if not one of the people, nevertheless the people, the democracy, will yet have nothing to do with him.... Whitman, instead of being a true democrat, is simply the most incorrigible of aristocrats masquing in a peasant's costume." (Ibid.)

[2]"He talks of labor as one who has never really labored; his "Drum Taps" proceed from one who has never personally responded to the tap of the drum. This is his fatal and insurmountable defect; and it is because his own countrymen instinctively recognize this, and foreigners do not, that his following has always been larger abroad than at home." (Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Contemporaries, p. 83.)

[3]Santayana does not regard Whitman as truly representative of America. He is so regarded "chiefly by foreigners who look for some grotesque expression of the genius of so young and prodigious a people." [Quoted in the "Contributor's Club," Atlantic Monthly, XCII (Nov., 1903), 715.]

[4]"His own countrymen...steadily refuse to accept him as representative of themselves...." G. E. Woodbury, "American Literature" Encyclopaedia Britannica (eleventh edition) (Cambridge, 1910), I, 840.

[5]Sir Edmund Gosse, The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne (London, 1917), p. 276.

received the same scant recognition here as he got from his own countrymen."[1]

There is a measure of truth at least in all of this. It must be kept in mind in getting a whole and accurate picture of Whitman's reception. The fairest statement of the phenomenon is given by Professor Blodgett:

> The Americans, conscious of the common criticism of their literary crudity and bumptiousness, wished to be considered as having grown too civilized to be deluded by Whitman's barbarism. The English, tired of a second-rate American literature superficially polished by a patterning after Old World models, hailed Whitman's originality....[2]

If it was Whitman's "originality" which first attracted attention, his British critics at least went beyond it and discussed much more. Soon after such men of repute as W. M. Rossetti and Swinburne had praised Whitman, the inevitable opposition announced itself. The result was a fairly thorough discussion of Whitmanism.

Before we survey these critical attitudes, something must be said about the editions in which Whitman came to Britain.

It could be argued quite convincingly that British critics were reviewing only parts and selections of Whitman--such as the carefully pruned selection which W. M. Rossetti published in 1868.

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[1] Athenaeum, LXX (April 2, 1892), 437.

[2] Harold Blodgett, op. cit., p. viii. Symonds makes a similar diagnosis in a letter to W. M. Rossetti. Cf. W. M. Rossetti, Rossetti Papers: 1862-1870 (London, 1903), p. 366.

This (so the argument might run) made the British more receptive to Whitman than they would have been, had he not been made "respectable" by British editors and publishers.

The grounds for such an argument are fairly solid. Whitman himself complained to Traubel of having appeared in Britain only in "pieces, extracts, bits, expurgations...."[1] George C. Macaulay noted that there was no complete edition of Leaves of Grass until 1881--this being the edition published by David Bogue, and including the whole of the "Preface" to the 1855 edition.[2] Blodgett verifies the Bogue edition as the first complete edition,[3] and also finds that the early British reviews of Whitman before Rossetti's selection are as hostile as the American reviews. "If there is a difference," comments Blodgett, "it is that the American reception is slightly more friendly."[4] And Blodgett makes Rossetti's careful editing responsible at least in part for the later warmth of reception in Britain.

But the editions do not really carry this much weight in determining British attitudes towards Whitman's theories of American literature--of modern literature. First of all, Rossetti's selection was not, strictly speaking, an expurgation; it was, as he

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[1]Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman ..., II, 419.

[2]Nineteenth Century, XII (Dec. 1882), 903.

[3]Harold Blodgett, op. cit., p. 191 n.

[4]Ibid., p. 9.

explains, "a selection of particular pieces in which there was nothing to expurgate."[1] Although the effect could be the same in either case on Whitman's chances for general acceptance, such editing could have no effect upon the acceptability of his specific teaching on the question of American literary orientation. For what Rossetti did exclude had little or no bearing on this and related problems; he simply wanted to avoid Whitman's "extreme crudities of expression in the way of indecency...."[2] Even Rossetti's edited version of the 1855 "Preface," while it deleted crude expressions (on Whitman's authority), did nothing to alter the thought. This kind of editing did not obscure from readers Whitman's central theses about democratic art.

Secondly, and more important, complete editions, whether authorized or not, did in fact have a fairly good distribution. Even the ill-fated 1855 edition seems to have picked up a London publisher's imprint; for the Saturday Review, in 1856, gave the book this announcement: "Leaves of Grass. New York: Brooklyn. [sic.] London: Horsell. 1855."[3] In 1860, the same journal reviewed "the sixth or seventh edition which has appeared in the United States." Again it seems to have found its way to a London

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[1] W. M. Rossetti, Some Reminiscences (London, 1906), II, 404.

[2] Entry in Rossetti's diary for September 6, 1867. Reprinted in Rossetti Papers, quoted by Blodgett, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

[3] Saturday Review, I (March 15, 1856), 393.

publisher, for the announcement reads:

> Leaves of Grass. By Walt Whitman. Boston: Thayer and Eldridge. Year 85 of the States. London: Trubner and Co. 1860.[1]

Whitman's American edition of 1872, published at Washington, D.C., was pirated by John Hotten.[2] Saintsbury, in 1874, must have had this one in hand when he referred to a "new edition of Leaves of Grass" which was greatly revised and expanded, and included "Drum Taps." He gave no date, but identified it as "London: Chatto and Windus."[3] In 1876, five years before Bogue's "first complete edition," the Saturday Review noted somewhat bitterly that "there is one firm at least in London which is not ashamed to advertise a 'complete' edition of Whitman's work."[4]

The final evidence for a good distribution of the complete Whitman must come from Whitman himself. It was in the course of a complaint to Traubel about appearing in fragments in Britain, that he suggested something which would seem completely out of proportion to the Whitman Circle in America:

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[1] Saturday Review, X (July 7, 1860), 19.

[2] Blodgett, op. cit., p. 191. Cf. also Whitman's letter to Rudolph Schmidt, in Traubel, With Walt Whitman ..., I, 408.

[3] Academy, VI (October 10, 1874), 398.

[4] Saturday Review, XLI (March 18, 1876), 360. This is probably a reference to Hotten's Chatto and Windus piracy. It could, however, refer to another piracy, or to an American edition only being sold in London. James Thomson speaks of the complete American edition of 1872 being available from Trubner's--but he does not state whether it is the actual Washington edition, or the Hotten piracy, or another piracy by Trubner. Cf. James Thomson, Walt Whitman, p. 1.

> The fact is, I am probably not any more popular there than here: it may even be that counting the sales of the Leaves complete many more books have been sold in America than in England.[1]

The point is that he is speaking here of complete editions; and that the common and accepted notion (in terms of which he is speaking) is that even these complete editions sold better in Britain than in America. Although Whitman contested the notion, he put the whole question in proper perspective.

It should also be noted that most of Whitman's ardent champions certainly did have complete editions, among them W. M. Rossetti, H. Buxton Forman, Mrs. Gilchrist, Symonds, Dowden, Buchanan, and Edward Carpenter. The fact does not seem to have influenced adversely their estimates of Whitman.

II.

As for Whitman, so for James: the real proving-ground was Britain, not America. James, like Whitman but for almost opposite reasons, was largely ignored in his homeland. Then too, American criticism was just beginning to formulate what it thought American literature should be, and James fitted the pattern no better than Whitman. Although Whitman was a strong patriot and a strong literary nationalist, he was too new, too different, too unconventional as a moralist, too far out of joint with popular predecessors like Longfellow, Bryant, and Whittier. James was an

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[1]Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman ..., II, 420.

expatriate who was too fond of Europe, writing fiction at a time when strong national feeling was rampant and fiction writers like Twain and Harte and the regionalists were carving out distinctively American pieces. It is hardly reasonable to expect valuable criticism of James to have come out of such a situation. A critic of his work, especially if he were to seek out and evaluate James's attempts to modify the course of the stream of modern literature, would need detachment and perspective; these positions were more accessible to British than to American critics.

James was not really popular in either country. He was fortunate in having an early spurt of popularity which gave him a ready market in American magazines and made him a lion in London society; but this waned early, especially in America.[1] His sales steadily declined, and he complained to Gosse at the age of seventy-two,

> I remain at my age...and after my long career, utterly, unsurmountably, unsaleable.[2]

He expressed the same sentiments to Howells and H. G. Wells.[3] His attempt to write for the stage was in part a deliberate attempt to improve his financial status, for the novels had been selling poorly; when this venture collapsed he wrote his last novels--the

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[1] Donald M. Murray, "Henry James and the English Reviewers, 1882-1890," American Literature, XXIV (March, 1952), 1-2.

[2] James, Letters, II, 515.

[3] Ibid., I, 135-137, 230; II, 503-505.

novels of "the major phase"--in conscious defiance of public taste.[1]

He was neglected in America more severely than in England. In the 1890's even the publishers turned cool.[2] John Hay complained of America's treatment of James in 1882, and blamed much of it on a spirit of patriotism.

> The worst thing in our time about American taste (wrote Hay) is the way it treats James. I believe he would not be read in America at all if it were not for his European vogue. If he lived in Cambridge he could write what he likes, but because he finds London more agreeable, he is the prey of all the patriotisms.[3]

Hay's statement about the "European vogue" is not really accurate. This vogue certainly is not apparent in the literary periodicals of the time, and Murray has shown that James, at this very time, complained that Europe was ignoring him even more than was America.[4] The truth probably lies somewhere between. It must be remembered that the Academy, in 1897, listed Henry James among forty names for election to a proposed Academy of Letters;[5] it must also be remembered, as the Quarterly Review pointed out, that the British reading public, weary of the same

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[1]Murray, op. cit.

[2]Grant C. Knight, The Critical Period in American Literature (Chapel Hill, 1951), pp. 14, 22-23, 106, 143.

[3]William R. Theyer, Life and Letters of John Hay (London, 1915), p. 411.

[4]Murray, op. cit., p. 4.

[5]Academy, LII (Nov. 6, 1897), 376.

old puppets and machinery of the English novelists, watched American writing with great interest in the hope of finding a change of scene and character.[1] Professor Gohdes[2] has calculated that James was reviewed less often in Britain than was Whitman; this is especially significant when we notice the large number of separate volumes of James which was published. But a bibliography of British reviews of James runs to hundreds of items, surely enough to make a study of them worthwhile. There were readers and reviewers and critics enough.

There was not always vision enough, though. It was difficult for the Victorians, hostile or friendly, to see Henry James as a representative of a particular cultural and literary orientation. It is fairly safe to generalize and note that before 1882 (through The Portrait of a Lady) there was much conservative objection to his realism, usually on moralistic grounds, and little attempt to see into his methods,[3] after 1882 there is a good deal of discussion of his methods and techniques, with a strong tendency to praise him as a skilled, delicate artist or to find fault with his delicacy and over-refinement. But many of the critics overlooked the concepts underlying James's methods; James

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[1] Quarterly Review, CLV (Jan., 1883), 202.

[2] Amer. Lit. in 19th Century England, 139.

[3] Professor Murray has discovered, for example, that not a single reviewer of The Portrait of a Lady caught James's device of revealing the character of Isabella Archer through the other characters surrounding her. (Critical Reception..., p. 49.)

himself, reflecting in 1888[1] on the English critics and reviewers, complained that the English novel

> had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it--of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison.

One reason James's broader concepts of art and his complex relationship to American literature were often overlooked was that the "timing" of his books was working against him. His ideas about America and the artist, about the artist and society and culture, are best expressed in his earliest books, especially Roderick Hudson, The Passionate Pilgrim, the early short stories, and Hawthorne. These books should have served as a clue to what James was really attempting; they should have given added meaning to James's place in his century. But when these books were published, James had not yet caught the attention of the critics. They did not pay James the honor of broad and intensive reviewing until the appearance of Daisy Miller, by which time he had pretty well said what he wanted to say about the situation of the artist in the modern world.

Then too, British critics were often set against James by the highly publicized tribute which Howells published in 1882. Howells' praise was expensive for James's reputation; it

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[1] The Art of Fiction, ed. Michael Roberts (New York, 1948), p. 3.

infuriated many critics[1]--critics who might have come to see James in perspective--by ranking James above Dickens and Thackeray. Because the British referred to it so often, it might be well to insert part of Howells' claim here:

> The art of fiction has, in fact, become a finer art in our day than it was with Dickens and Thackeray. We could not suffer the confidential attitude of the latter now, nor the mannerisms of the former, any more than we could endure the prolixity of Richardson or the coarseness of Fielding. These great men are of the past--they and their methods and their interests; even Trollope and Reade are not of the present. The new school derives from Hawthorne and George Eliot rather than any others.... This school...finds its chief exemplar in Mr. James; it is he who is shaping and directing American fiction, at least.[2]

James's highly artistic sensibilities also detracted the critics from seriously discussing his themes. As they began to grasp his techniques and methods, they began to treat them as ends in themselves, with little regard for broader implications. In seven different reviews of Embarrassments (1896), for example, no mention is made of "The Figure in the Carpet," and "The Next Time" receives but scanty general comment. Yet these stories are of great importance. The critics were puzzled and baffled by The Tragic Muse (1890); The Academy, generally warm

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[1]Within a five year period, five long articles appeared attacking James in the context of Howells' claim: National Review (April, 1883), Quarterly Review (January, 1883), Academy (April and December, 1886), and Macmillan's (March, 1887).

[2]Quoted in Academy, XXX (Dec. 25, 1886), 423.

to James, called it "an idiot asylum";[1] but again, the focus was on technique, and the novel's treatment of the artist in society was ignored. James's first installment of his autobiography, A Small Boy, was given many, many columns of review space--but almost all of it was devoted to a discussion of the unconventional form of the book. The concern with form and craft, while it necessarily opened up some of the bigger questions in James, did tend to drown out frequent and full discussion of these questions. William Wetmore Story and his Friends, now regarded as a very important work by Philip Rahv[2] and as "a major document on James's own relations with Europe" by Morton D. Zabel,[3] was almost completely ignored by the Victorians.

Whitman was an American bard--strangely, characteristically American and conveniently bardic; but James was neither of these. He was cosmopolitan, and he was a novelist who systematically excluded self-expression from his work. Because of his cosmopolitanism, English critics often treated him as though he were English; his work stimulated less discussion than it should have of American literature and the problems associated with it. Because his work was carefully impersonal, many critics simply ignored him; the impersonality violated a widely held Victorian

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[1] XLII (Aug. 16, 1890), 175.

[2] The Discovery of Europe (Boston, 1947), 270.

[3] The Portable Henry James (New York, 1951), 689.

criterion. Other critics concentrated on technique, manner, and method.

But although much of the criticism of James is oblique rather than direct, it is relieved by occasional pieces of full and penetrating work. And even the oblique approach reveals some highly interesting reflections of the Victorian sense of orientation. The most profound of James's Victorian critics, for our purposes, are Dixon Scott, Elizabeth Carey, Morton Fullerton, Robert Buchanan, Rebecca West, Ford Maddox Hueffer, and Lena Milman.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE OLD ORDER: TORIES AND CULTURAL CONSERVATIVES

As the nineteenth century moved beyond its mid-point, the United States was at the brink of an ugly Civil War and the pressure for social and political reform in England was mounting. The American experiment with commercialized democratic society seemed doomed to bloody and reckless defeat. The English felt little sympathy for the Yankee "cause"; even at Cambridge, the more liberal of the great universities, sympathies were so entirely with the South that Leslie Stephen, a rare sympathizer with the North, found himself cut off from his friends. But at the same time the Liberals and radicals were gaining power and influence. England was changing rapidly; her sense of orientation was disturbed. The old aristocracy had been crippled by the repeal of the Corn Laws; its members had either to limp on behind or to fall into a new and different step. The word Tory was becoming difficult to define.

It is important to remember that throughout the remainder of the century there are at least three different groups of Tories: the traditionalist Tories, who resisted social and political change and were violently anti-democratic (Alfred Austin, among men of letters, is exemplary); the Tory democrats, led by Disraeli and Randolph Churchill, who opposed the problems of the age by giving the masses paternal leadership and social reform, but a

bare minimum of political power; and finally, of less importance, the democratic Tories, whose motto seems to have been, give the people political power and they will not want social reform.

When America's Civil War was over and the Union surprisingly saved, the English began to watch the overseas experiment with even greater interest. England was sweeping on towards the second and third great Reform Bills; some form of democracy seemed to be the inevitable outcome. The old political conservatism was finding it necessary to modify and adapt itself. And as the British of all political persuasions watched developments in American culture, they were forced to re-examine the principles and assumptions of their own culture. Here the already complex party-lines were broken; it was not only Tories of one sort or another who could be expected to be apprehensive about American culture. Many of the "cultural conservatives"--Arnold and Lecky, for example--were essentially political liberals. But they had in common with Toryism a fear of anarchy and mobism, a respect for traditions and order, a reliance on a cultured class who would dominate learning and the arts with detachment and a sense of noblesse oblige, and often a fear that the middle classes were at best ill equipped to assume the obligations of their newly won power.

Inevitably, the conservatives betray some longing for the settled and ordered past. Sometimes it is a pleasing nostalgia, sometimes a bitter, narrow-minded, confused clanging on the alarum bell. The National Review, an organ for Tory traditionalism at

the end of the century, reflects both of these moods. Alfred Austin, Poet Laureate and sometime editor of the National, reveals this extreme Toryism in all its nostalgia and testiness. In a long article on the "Revival of Common Sense," written fifty-four years after the Reform Bill of 1832,[1] Austin declared that Englishmen since 1832 have been living in "an era of nonsense"; the middle classes are totally devoid of common sense, and the only hope for England lies in a return to aristocratic rule, based upon reason and experience and common sense. But this is not entirely or even characteristically the conservative mind in the Victorian age. It is almost a caricature, one which passes too often for the real thing. It must be modified by Disraeli's passion for social reforms which the Liberals fought against, by Frederic Harrison's interest in Bismarck,[2] by Matthew Arnold's concern for the present and future, and his dismissal of the aristocracy as "barbarians."

I.

Matthew Arnold's campaign against barbarism and Philistinism and his careful definitions of civilization and culture clearly mark him as a cultural conservative. But like Tocqueville's

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[1] National Review, VII (1886), 552-565.

[2] "The Radical Programme," Contemporary Review, XLIV (1886), 264-79. Harrison advocates education of opinion, government by competence, and authority by acquiescence.

conservatism, Arnold's is vitalized by a political liberalism.

His battlefield was primarily England. But Arnold realized that the English were increasingly turning towards America. In fact, as Professor Lowrey[1] suggests and the preface to Arnold's Report on French Schools indicates, his persistent references to French civilization may have been a conscious attempt to divert the attentions of the Victorians away from America. Surely America could be of no help in the fight against Philistinism; her Philistine class was almost her only class. America, Arnold observed, is "just ourselves, with the Barbarians quite left out, and the Populace nearly."[2] She presents "only a heightened picture of the Englishman's own faults,"[3] failing almost completely to reflect "whatsoever things are elevated."[4]

Arnold's concern about America and her influence upon England goes back at least as far as 1848. In that year he wrote about "a wave of more than American vulgarity, moral, intellectual, and social, preparing to break over us." America's crime did not lie in being different from the English, but in being so like the English Philistine.[5] It was the vulgarity that disturbed

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[1] "Introduction," Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough (London, 1932), pp. 48-9.

[2] Five Uncollected Essays (Liverpool, 1953), p. 6.

[3] Ibid., p. 7.

[4] Discourses in America (London, 1885), p. 66.

[5] The Letters of Matthew Arnold, ed. G.E.W. Russell (London 1895), I, 4.

him first. Although he claimed in "A Word About America" not to have spoken publically of American vulgarity before, the truth is that he had done so: in a sonnet in 1848, in the preface to Culture and Anarchy in 1869, and in the essay "Equality" in 1878.

After the American Civil War, Arnold became more concerned and interested but less critical and fearful. In Friendship's Garland[1] he satirized the pro-Confederacy leanings of his countrymen (and himself); Arminius says to his English friend, after satirizing English smugness and misunderstanding,

> Do you not see that all these blunders dispose the Americans, who are very shrewd, and who have been succeeding as steadily as you have been failing, to answer: "We have got the lead, no thanks to you, and we mean to astonish the world without you!"

America he now saw as an untamed giant, rich in potential but dangerously disoriented. In Culture and Anarchy, Arnold again attacked the idea, popularized by Cobden and Bright, that England should chart her course in the wake of America; but Arnold now no longer felt that England had much to teach America, either. Both were in need of Hellenization.

The theme of Arnold's five essays on America--and the key to his concern about American influence--can be stripped down to this: "... As we in England have to transform our civilization, so America has hers still to make."[2] He found in America an

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[1](London, 1903), p. 149.

[2]Five Uncollected Essays, p. 6.

abundance of wealth, a strong economy, infinite natural resources; but he found little that was beautiful or elevating or "interesting":

> Of the really beautiful in...the arts, and in literature, very little has been produced there as yet. I asked a German portrait-painter, whom I found painting and prospering in America, how he liked the country? 'How can an artist like it?' was his answer. The American artists live chiefly in Europe...[1]

Arnold feared that this might be a prophetic glimpse of the Britain that the middle class capitalists and John Bright wanted to build.

He used America, in fact, as a foil to his reflections on the cultural crisis in Victorian Britain. The orientation of a shifting, changing world could not be westward. For American Philistinism was worse than English Philistinism; it excluded not only aristocratic and popular elements, but the Celtic and Norman elements of the English heritage as well.[2] And all of these elements were endangered in Britain by the increasing domination of the middle classes. The American essays were merely continuing the critical mission begun in Culture and Anarchy.

Arnold saw the British aristocracy bogged down in its own materialism. But America had a worse problem: no aristocracy at all, and no substitute for it.[3] Still, the institution of an

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[1] Five Uncollected Essays, p. 55.

[2] On the Study of Celtic Literature (New York, 1909), p. 133.

[3] Five Uncollected Essays, p. 19.

aristocracy in America could not solve the cultural problem, for the aristocracy was already too altered in character. Arnold scorned Hussey Vivian's notion that America could be civilized by an American aristocracy. And yet, the absence of a past aristocracy in America seemed to him a major cause of the failure to solve "the human problem." If the British had not the cathedrals and homes built in aristocratic ages, if they had only the towns and buildings erected by the middle classes since the eighteenth century, their situation would be as serious as that of the Americans.

> We should be living with much the same absence of training for the sense of beauty through the eye, from the aspect of outward things.[1]

America, then, illustrates negatively the importance of an aristocracy at some stage in a society's history.

> It seems as if few stocks could be trusted to grow up properly without having a priesthood and an aristocracy to act as their schoolmasters at some time or other of their national existence.[2]

> ....in America, perhaps, we see the disadvantages of having social equality before there has been any...high standard of social life and manners formed.[3]

The complete indifference to "the ideal of a high and rare excellence" on the part of a growing world power seemed to Arnold

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[1] Five Uncollected Essays, p. 55.

[2] Letters, I, 115.

[3] Complete Works, X, 65.

dangerous. The effect upon literature was too obvious to mention--indeed, literature was always in Arnold's mind when he wrote social criticism, present by implication in "culture" and "civilization." Elevation, humanization, and cultivation were necessities, and they could only be achieved in America by a change in the social temper.

> The average man is too much a religion there; his performance is unduly magnified, his shortcomings are not duly seen and admitted.[1]

Arnold warned his American audiences that they must look to the Remnant, not to the Majority, for their salvation. It was his way of saying that Whitman's dream-America, with its isolation from the past and its worship of the common, would never suffice even if it could be realized. But his fear was not simply a fear of democracy; in an age of growing democracy, Arnold felt obligated "to prevent the English people from becoming, with the growth of democracy, Americanized."[2] His hope was that the Americans would come to recognize the necessity of culture, pay homage to "the best that has been thought and said in the world." Their nationalism was cutting them off from the traditions and refinements that made life human. The need was for a sense of excellence; this had to fill the void left by

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[1] Essays in Criticism, Second Series (London, 1888), p. 57.

[2] Mixed Essays, Irish Essays, and Others (New York, 1908), p. 17.

> the absence of men of any culture in America, where everybody knows that the earth is an oblate spheroid and nobody knows anything worth knowing.

All this clearly indicates an antipathy between Whitman and Arnold and a sense of common cause between Henry James and Arnold. Whitman saw Arnold as "one of the dudes of literature."[1] who "came in at the rear of a procession two thousand years old--the great army of critics, parlor apostles, worshippers of hangings, laces...."[2] On the occasion of Arnold's death, Whitman told the New York Herald that "the fine gentleman, the purist, even the fine scholar, was probably never really less called for.... I doubt whether America will miss Arnold at all."[3] Commenting on Arnold's insistence that culture is the one thing needed, Whitman told Traubel, "Arnold always gives you the notion that he hates to touch the dirt.... But everything comes out of the dirt--everything: everything comes out of people."[4] Arnold, Whitman thought,

> was weak on the democratic side: he had some intellectual perception of democracy but he didn't have the feel of the thing...he was first of all the leader, the superior, the teacher....[5]

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[1]Quoted by Lionel Trilling, Matthew Arnold, p. 396.

[2]Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman, I, 23.

[3]J. H. Birss, "Whitman on Arnold: An Uncollected Comment." Mod. Lang. Notes (May, 1932), p. 317. The original comment appeared in the April 16, 1888 issue of the New York Herald.

[4]Quoted by Trilling, p. 398.

[5]Traubel, III, p. 37.

Whitman's concept of a democratic culture put feeling above intellect, abolished the idea of leadership and teaching, and buried traditions and the past. Though Arnold took little interest in Whitman--his letters last mention Whitman in 1867, and on both visits to the United States he was near Camden but made no effort to visit him--it is precisely this concept of culture that he feared. He was quite specific in attacking the nationalist movement in American literature:

> I see advertized The Primer of American Literature. Imagine the face of Philip or Alexander at hearing of a Primer of Macedonian Literature.... We are all contributors to one great literature--English literature...these things are not only absurd; they are also retarding.[1]

The riches of tradition, already in danger of becoming disengaged from Victorian English life, had to play their part in the formation of an American literature. In Arnold's one surviving comment on Whitman,[2] the theme is the same:

> As to the general question of Mr. Walt Whitman's poetical achievements, you will think that it savours of our decrepit old Europe when I add that while you think it his highest merit that he is so unlike anyone else, to me this seems to be his demerit; no one can afford in literature to trade merely on his own bottom and to take no account of what the other ages and nations have acquired: a great original literature America will not get in this way, and her intellect must inevitably consent to come...into the European movement.[3]

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[1] Civilization in the United States, 61-2.

[2] Blodgett, Walt Whitman in England, p. 168.

[3] Quoted by Trilling, p. 397.

America can still, Arnold insisted, have intellectual independence; the thing she must avoid is "an eccentric and violent originality."[1]

Arnold and James, as we have seen in Chapter VIII, saw the problem of orientation in much the same way. James's "dispatriation" is a clever application of Arnold's "disinterestedness" to the rootless predicament of the American writer. James was almost the only passionate admirer of Arnold to come out of nineteenth century America,[2] surely a guarantee of the indifference of other Americans. Arnold was conscious of the kinship between himself and the younger expatriate American novelist. Soaking in the self-satisfaction of his own "A Word About America," he wrote to Sir Mountstuart Grant Duff,[3]

> I think you would have liked it.... At any rate, Henry James, the novelist, being asked by Knowles to write a reply to it, said after reading it that he could not write a reply to it, it was so true, and carried him so along with it.

Arnold's busy life as a school inspector, speaker, and contributor to journals probably left him little time for novel reading. In any case, he was not a devoted novel reader; his mark as a critic was not made by his comments upon novelists. He had read Hawthorne, of course; he found his talent to be "of the

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[1] Quoted by Trilling.

[2] Ibid., p. 392.

[3] Letters, II, p. 200.

first order," but found his subjects (sin, guilt, and solitude) uninteresting.[1] Like most nineteenth century critics--Robert Buchanan, of all people, is the exception in Britain--Arnold did not know Melville. But he had read something of both Howells and James (an interesting choice!), and he used the same word to describe the novels of each: "charming."[2] Arnold left no extensive comments upon James's work; but his choice of a favorite is interesting and probably revealing. The one book he singled out was Roderick Hudson.[3] Arnold was apparently partially blind to the formal defects of the book. Few if any critics in 1885, ten years after its publication, would have hit upon this book as the James novel most deserving of mention. But it was the social critic in Arnold that responded to young James's first novel. For it was in this novel, more than in any other, that James was reflecting the American artist's need of the European objects and frame of mind that Arnold called culture.

II.

A conservative prophet who was even less a novel-reader than Arnold was Thomas Carlyle. He too sensed the magnetic attraction that America held for many of his bewildered contemporaries. As

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[1] Discourses in America, p. 174.

[2] Ibid.; Mixed Essays, p. 479.

[3] Civilization in the United States, p. 79.

a young man, he had himself considered emigrating. Unlike Arnold, Carlyle felt that democracy itself portended catastrophe; he fulminated against it in such pieces as "Shooting Niagara." But even for Carlyle, with all his hostility to the democratic groundswells, there was something fascinating about the New World. In his early years he saw it often as a land of sunshine and hope and hard work and strong Anglo-Saxon pioneers. The Civil War discouraged him, and may account for the bitterness of "Shooting Niagara" and the passage in Frederick the Great which attacks American government as "an anarchy which has been challenging the Universe to show the like, ever since...and does need much to get burnt out that matters may begin anew on truer conditions."[1] Carlyle, even before the war, could be as astounded as anyone by the quantity of America's material production, but he looked in vain for some great thought or noble thing. America has given the world, grumbled Carlyle, "with a rapidity beyond recorded example, eighteen millions of the greatest bores ever seen in this world before."[2] "What great human soul," he asked, "what great thought, what great noble thing that one could worship or loyally admire" has been produced in America?[3] Still, after 1871, Carlyle's letters to Emerson show a gradual return to some kind

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[1](New York, 1866-8), VI, p. 263.

[2]Latter Day Pamphlets (London, 1850), p. 172.

[3]Ibid., p. 171.

of modified hope for America. Characteristically, however, Carlyle could believe that America would produce a vital civilization only "with the aid of centuries."[1] She would have difficulty controlling the evil forces--the"gold nuggetting"--within her.

What the mature Carlyle knew of America he knew largely by way of his friend and fellow transcendentalist, Emerson. The blunt estimates of Emerson's work in Carlyle's letters to him are still worth reading. Throughout those fascinating letters, Carlyle is impressed by the grand view of the universe in Emerson's poems. Traces of Carlyle's uneasiness with artistic form (a trait which allies him with Whitman) are freely evident in his statement to Emerson that the poems have ideas which are worth the struggle of reading, and in his growling complaint that Emerson insists on taking "circumbendibuses for sound's sake."[2] His tone is remarkably like Emerson's (and later Whitman's) when he thunders forth his enthusiasm for The American Scholar with this kind of language:

> ...Lo, out of the West comes a clear utterance, clearly recognisable as a Man's voice, and I have a kinsman and brother.[3]

What Carlyle sought in Emerson--though he was often disappointed--

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[1] Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York, 1883), II, 377.

[2] Ibid., II, 146.

[3] Ibid., I, 141-2.

was free, rugged masculinity. One of his constant criticisms is that Emerson must come down from the mountain-tops, get out of the abstract and ethereal.[1] This is, in fact, Carlyle's main objection to the American writers in general.[2] But there is another, more significant criticism which separates Carlyle from Emerson--and consequently from Thoreau, Whitman, and most of the Westward-oriented tradition in American literature. In commenting on Emerson's Society and Solitude (1870), Carlyle takes issue with the excess of Emersonian, American, optimistic disregard for evil.[3] Charles Eliot Norton, the editor of the Emerson-Carlyle correspondence and a close friend of Henry James, knew both men well enough to sense this irreparable difference between them. Upon returning to Boston after a prolonged visit with Carlyle in London (1873), Norton[4] wrote this to his aging host:

> All life is likely to be solitary in America to one who cannot share that confident spirit of cheerful optimistic fatalism of which Emerson is the voice and the prophet.

One cannot imagine Carlyle, after "struggling" through Emerson's poems, struggling through a novel by Henry James. We tend to imagine that his response would be much the same as Whitman's. But we also often tend to imagine that Carlyle's

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[1] Corresp. Emerson and Carlyle, I, 383.

[2] Ibid., I, 169, 330, 339; II, 12. [3] Ibid., II, 359.

[3] Letters of Charles Eliot Norton, ed. Sara Norton and M. A. De Wolfe Howe (New York, 1913), II, 18.

strong instincts for manliness, naturalness, things of the soil, and a transcendentalist view of nature would make him an easy victim to the lusty voice of Whitman. Indeed, Whitman himself sensed a great deal of similarity, as we have seen in Chapter VII. He could even forgive Carlyle his anti-democratic pronouncements and judgments. His debt to the vitriolic old Scot was as great as was James's debt to Arnold. Had Carlyle read Leaves of Grass, suggests Professor Holloway,[1] he "might have recognized something of his Sartor Resartus in more than the style of the book." Whitman, another critic[2] has shown, had read most of Carlyle, and read it deeply. When Leaves of Grass appeared in 1855, both Whitman and Emerson sent a copy to Carlyle.

But Carlyle never satisfied his American correspondents. In all the writings, letters, and memoirs from which scholars must reconstruct Carlyle, there are only three references to Whitman.[3] In a letter to Emerson, Carlyle said of Whitman's book that "it was as though the town bull had learned to hold the pen." In conversation, Carlyle told William Allingham in 1872 that he found Democratic Vistas "somewhat" good.[4] He confided to Moncure Conway

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[1] Walt Whitman: An Interpretation in Narrative (New York, 1926), p. 136.

[2] William Silas Vance, Carlyle and the American Transcendentalists (Chicago, 1941), p. 394.

[3] Cf. Gregory Paine, "The Literary Relations of Whitman and Carlyle," Studies in Philology, XXXVI (July, 1939), 550-569.

[4] Ibid.

his distrust of Whitman's break with tradition--probably the source of Carlyle's lack of interest in Whitman: "Ah, I cannot like him. It all seems to be, 'I'm a big man because I live in such a big country.'" And then he added, significantly, "America ...will have to learn from the experience and age of the world."[1]

Whitman was right: he was "outside to Carlyle."[2] Every word that came to him indirectly from the prophet he admired was "distinctly unfavorable."[3] Carlyle's kinship with transcendentalism did not dispose him to deny the existence of evil or the importance of tradition and experience.

III.

By far the most explicit and articulate conservative critique of Whitman in the nineteenth century--in British or American criticism--can be found in the writings of Peter Bayne. Bayne is now all but unknown; his miscellaneous critical writings have never been gathered into a book. In an age such as ours, with its keen interest in the neo-conservative assault on Liberalism (witness again Hulme, Eliot, Pound, Tate, Viereck, and Auden), Bayne deserves some attention.

He was a Scot who had studied philosophy under the Cairds at

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[1]Moncure D. Conway, Thomas Carlyle (New York, 1881), p. 100.

[2]Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, II, 328.

[3]Vance, Carlyle and the American Transcendentalists, p. 409.

Glasgow University. Equally well read in philosophy, theology, and history, he gave much of his attention to studying and writing Puritan history. Politically, Bayne was a Tory. He edited and contributed to a number of periodicals, among them Hogg's Weekly Magazine, The Contemporary Review, Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, and the Christian World.[1] Bertram Dobell rightly called him "the ablest of Whitman's opponents."[2] Professor Blodgett accused him of pouncing upon Whitman "like a Sunday School superintendent upon a bad boy" but goes on to characterize Bayne's criticism as "a very plausible Tory attack" which "states with adequacy and vigor the formidable case that all respectable persons have against Leaves of Grass."[3]

Blodgett's use of "respectable" just after the simile of a Sunday School superintendent is an intentional slur, and it obscures the genuine quality of Bayne's criticism.

Bayne recognized the need for originality in literature; but even originality must work within limits. Whitman exceeds the bounds which are fixed to "sound poetic originality," and hence "is merely grotesque, and surprising."[4] Originality must be

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[1]Lloyd C. Sanders, ed., Celebrities of the Century (London, 1887), p. 104; Ronald Bayne, "Peter Bayne," Dictionary of National Biography, XXII (Supplement), 146-147.

[2]Bertram Dobell, "Introduction," in James Thomson, op. cit., p. vii.

[3]Harold Blodgett, op. cit., p. 199.

[4]Peter Bayne, "Walt Whitman's Poems," Contemporary Review, XXVII (December, 1875), 67.

genuine; there must be changes, but they must confine themselves to general principles which govern the various genres of art. It is the function of the critic to act as a control in this process.

> If the necessity of being original lies hard upon poets in these days, is it not all the more...the duty of the critics to press upon them the equally inexorable necessity of resisting the fascinations of false and affected originality?[1]

"Every art-product," Bayne argued, "is new";

> but every art-product is also old; and the operation of producing a true poem or picture...consists essentially in combining newness of form and colour and musical harmony with oldness of principle and law.[2]

It is this that Whitman neglects; he is starting out on a path that can lead only to barbarism. But note that Bayne's argument for tradition is not based simply on a stubborn belief that literary classics cannot be surpassed, but can at best be imitated. There is always development in literature: but only, Bayne insisted, in the sense in which decay is also a kind of "development." Modern literature can surpass classical literature, because it is a natural outgrowth of it, maintaining an organic relationship with it in what Mr. Eliot was later to call a "continuing tradition." But if it defies the relationship, and sets out on its own, it cannot survive.

> By working in the spirit of the lesson taught it once and forever by Greece, Europe has gone beyond Greece; but as far as Europe, in Shakespeare, has transcended

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[1] Peter Bayne, "Walt Whitman's Poems," p. 66.

[2] Ibid.

> Greece, so far will America fall behind and below not Europe only, but Egypt, Babylon, and Assyria, if she cast the lesson of Greece to the winds and consent to the identification of democracy with lawless extravagance.[1]

This concept of a continuing tradition in art, with every part in organic relationship with every other part, was a natural opposite to Whitman's vision of a new literature springing naturally from the democratic standards of a mass culture. For Bayne, art is still art; the principles by which we judge it are tied to universals; universal truths are not modified by social change. Thus Bayne put no value on the Whitman _apologia_ which made an issue of the new demands of a new kind of culture. Nature in America, Whitman's "divine infant," may be different from nature in Europe; "but we do not, in crossing the Atlantic, pass from cosmos into chaos...."[2]

Peter Bayne was really the only Whitman opponent who covered him as completely as did supporters like Symonds and Dowden. He had an unfortunate disability for finding anything except "atrociously bad" verse in _Leaves of Grass_, but he saw clearly, from his own philosophical perspective, the central issues which Dowden and Symonds had seen (more easily) from theirs. Bayne is singular among Whitman's opponents for having seen clearly, and for having dealt with, the broad issues which Whitman implied.

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[1]Peter Bayne, "Walt Whitman's Poems."

[2]_Ibid._, p. 68.

Bayne was speaking from an entirely different view-point. He is almost in another universe of discourse--one which may have been peculiar in his own time, but one which is remarkably similar to the tone of the "new conservatives" of the present time. Political and social thought is deeply inter-mixed in his comments on Whitman. As a Tory he objected to Whitman's "subtle and pervasive flattery of the mob." He is (in retrospect) amusingly naive about the social changes which surrounded him--but he was simultaneously raising the right questions.

> Until I examined (Whitman's) book I did not know that the most venomously malignant of all political and social fallacies--that 'one man is as good as another' --had been deliberately taught in print.... Goethe said that poets raised men to the gods, and brought down the gods to men; but that every man was himself as good as either god or poet, Goethe would have denied with keenest brilliancy of scorn.[1]

If Bayne was quick to dismiss Whitman's art, it was partly because he was deeply interested in Whitman's thought. He had no patience with Whitman's joyous over-simplification of metaphysical problems: he decries the fact that

> ...problems that were felt to be insoluble by Shakespeare and Goethe have no difficulty for this bard of the West. Extravagant optimism and extravagant pessimism, both wrong and shallow, conduct him to "the entire denial of evil" (the words are Professor Dowden's)...and to the vociferous announcement that success and failure are pretty much the same.[2]

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[1] Bayne, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

[2] Ibid., p. 51.

This kind of optimism seemed to Bayne completely unwarranted: first, because it misconstrued reality, and second, because it was intimately bound up with an actual social program of near-anarchy which threatened to strangle "civilization." "His advice," said Bayne (and he was actually quoting),

> is to resist much and obey little. This is the political philosophy of bedlam...which has blasted the hopes of freedom wherever it has had the chance, and which must be chained up again with ineffable contempt if the self-government of nations is to mean anything else than the death and putrescence of civilization.[1]

Bayne ended his criticism on a more level note of warning, a note which is free of the sharp, antithetical Tory self-interest of which he has been accused. He complained of Whitman's "confounding liberty with dissolute anarchy," and stated well the case which he--almost alone among British critics--thinks can and must be set against Whitman:

> The poet of democracy he is not; but his books may serve to buoy, for the democracy of America, those shallow and sunken rocks on which, if it is cast, it must inevitably, amid the hootings of mankind, be wrecked.[2]

IV.

One of the most interesting Victorian reactions to Whitman can be traced over a twenty year period in the writings of

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[1] Bayne, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

[2] Ibid., p. 69.

Swinburne. Swinburne covered all the ground from adulation in 1868 through doubt and misgiving in the mid-1870's to fierce and indignant ridicule in 1887. The turnabout brought from Whitman a characteristic harumph: "Ain't he the damndest simulacrum?" Because Swinburne's gradual disenchantment, erroneously and too simply blamed on Watts-Dunton by Gosse and others, follows a course from liberal to conservative, from westward to eastward orientation, we must consider it here in a chapter on Victorian conservatism.

In Swinburne's early period--we may as well call it his Mazzini period--he was a fiery republican zealot with a passion for reform, for social and political revolution. Naturally he would advocate and want to be a part of an attending literary revolution. His attention, when it was not on Mazzini and political reform, was fixed on Blake. It was the rebel, the innovator, the unleashed spirit in Blake that fascinated him. In his book William Blake (1868) can be found his first mention of Whitman; the final chapter of the book is an essay on Whitman which applauds the new American poet as a contemporary parallel to Blake. Swinburne found in Whitman

> A sound as of sweeping wind...a splendour now of stars and now of storms; an expanse and exultation of wing across strange spaces of air...a depth of sympathy... as tender as Dante's; a power, intense and infallible, of pictorial concentration and absorption...an exquisite and lyrical excellence of form.[1]

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[1]A. C. Swinburne, William Blake (London, 1868), p. 302.

Three years later Swinburne published his Songs Before Sunrise. Revolutionary fervor was still running strong, as even the title of the volume suggests. Dedicated to Mazzini, it is a salute to freedom, democracy, and man-as-god. The liberalism is so intense that, in fact, the poem "To Walt Whitman in America"[1] is disappointing in its cold use of Whitman and America as little more than abstract symbols of freedom and hope. Whitman's verse is described as

> A song to put fire in our ears
> Whose burning shall burn up tears,
> Whose sign bid battle reform.

The interesting question is, How did Swinburne transport himself from this enthusiastic acceptance of Whitman to the blistering attack in "Whitmania" which asserted with biting condescension that "with a little more sense and a great deal more cultivation [Whitman] might...have made a noticeable orator"; that "with careful training" he might have matured into "a rather inferior kind of Southey"?[2]

Sir Edmund Gosse[3] explained the change as a manifestation of the influence of Theodore Watts-Dunton, with whom Swinburne lived

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[1] Complete Works, ed. Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas J. Wise (London, 1926), II, 184-189.

[2] A. C. Swinburne, Studies in Prose and Poetry (London, 1894), p. 140.

[3] Swinburne (London, 1917), p. 276 ff.

a life of near-dependence in the early 1880's. Professor Blodgett[1] apparently agrees: "If we turn again to the last pages of William Blake," writes Blodgett, "we are filled with a vast respect for the corrupting power of time--and Mr. Watts-Dunton." There is some good sense to this. Surely Watts-Dunton fanned the flame of disenchantment; Swinburne's reference in "Whitmania" to the "first critic of our time--perhaps the largest-minded and surest-sighted of any age"[2] is a traceable reference to Watts-Dunton. But actually, as W. B. Cairns had earlier shown,[3] Swinburne's about-face was the product of a slowly fermenting antipathy.

The growth of the antipathy is revealing. Swinburne did not meet Watts-Dunton until 1879, but by this time his estrangement from Whitman had a slow eight-year growth. Perhaps there was something artificial from the start about Swinburne's radicalism. W. M. Rossetti, at least, thought so. Already in 1870 he complained in a letter to Ann Gilchrist, a devotee who entertained ideas about marrying Whitman, about the "excited politico-humanitarian" tone in Swinburne, "pumped up by incitements from Mazzini principally. I don't think it well to be perpetually flaring up about the affair in verse, & moreover compelling

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[1] Walt Whitman in England, pp. 112-113.

[2] Studies in Prose and Poetry, p. 135.

[3] "Swinburne's Opinion of Whitman," American Literature, III (May, 1931), 125-135.

oneself to flare up."[1] Saintsbury thought he noticed the same sham in Swinburne:

> It is true that [Whitman] has been praised with discrimination as well as with emphasis, by Mr. Swinburne; but unfortunately Mr. Swinburne's praise is mainly a passport to the favour of those who would be likely to appreciate Whitman without any passport at all.[2]

In any case, genuine or sham, Swinburne's enthusiasm was breaking apart fairly early. One year after Songs Before Sunrise he published Under the Microscope. In it the seeds of antipathy are obvious. He was already doubtful about the democratic basis of the new literature:

> It is when he is thinking of his part, of the duties and properties of a representative poet, an official democrat, that the strength forsakes his hand and the music ceases at his lips.[3]

In spite of his avowal early in the book that he is "entirely at one with Whitman on general matters not less than on political,"[4] he is immediately uncomfortable with Whitman's uncompromising use of the word democracy. He wants it to include, for example, "a code of duties."[5] This is hardly popular language among nineteenth century liberals; it would fit more exactly a Carlyle or an Arnold. The matter came to a head with Swinburne's intervention in

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[1] W. M. Rossetti, Letters...Concerning Whitman, Blake, and Shelley, ed. Clarence Gohdes and P. F. Baum (Durham, N.C., 1934), p. 58.

[2] Academy, VI (Oct. 10, 1874), 398.

[3] Complete Works, XVI, 416-7. [4] Ibid., 413. [5] Ibid., 418.

Whitman's attempt to throw Shakespeare out of the new republic. For Swinburne to write that "...there has never been and can never be a book so infinitely democratic as the Plays of Shakespeare" is merely confusing, and indicates an unexpressed shift in the definition of the word democratic. It was when Swinburne tried to defend his statement that he showed the extent of the breach--for he stumbled through and explained with pompous obscurity that the plays were democratic because they "signify... the cyclic life and truth of equal and various humanity."[1] If such writing has any positive content, it is still brought forth with a noticeable lack of spirit.

The fact is, eight years before Watts-Dunton's entry from the right, Swinburne's zeal was fading. It now seemed to him

> foolish to talk of Whitman as the probable founder of a future school of poetry unlike any other in matter as in style. He has many of the qualities of the reformer; he has perhaps none of the qualities of a founder.[2]

Swinburne's letters of this period bear out the same growing estrangement.[3] In one of them, to W. M. Rossetti in 1876, he speaks of the pity of Whitman's "damned nonsense about poetry and verse."[4]

By 1887, the break was complete. In "Whitmania" he compared

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[1] Complete Works, XVI, 419. [2] Ibid., 425.

[3] Cairns, p. 135.

[4] Complete Works, XVIII, 254.

Whitman to Tupper and to Zola. Whitman, he said, cannot be put to shame because "you cannot take the breeks off a Highlander."[1] He found offensive the "obtrusive animalism of the Whitmaniad." Whitman's style was crude. He could now find in Whitman's Eve only

> a drunken apple-woman, indecently sprawling in the slush and garbage of the gutter amid the rotten refuse of her overturned fruit-stall.[2]

The old excitement about Whitman's strong freedom, his bardic power, his soaring, uninhibited naturalness, his auspicious portent of the life and the art to come, had died out in Swinburne.

Swinburne's reversal of opinion, complicated by a number of factors and going beyond a simple shift from liberal to conservative, was nonetheless certainly related to his fluctuations in social and political opinion. He had been a passionate liberal. Like most liberals, he looked hopefully towards America. But somehow he could not hold the vision. He finally rejected democracy as firmly as he rejected Whitman's democratic art--a theory of art that could dispense with Shakespeare. In the final years Swinburne steeled himself in aristocratic thought. He defended British participation in the Boer War, scorned Gladstone and the policy of Home Rule, and grumbled frequently about democracy.[3] He had flirted with the ideology and art of the new

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[1] Studies in Prose and Poetry, 137.

[2] Ibid., 138-9.

[3] Gosse, Swinburne, pp. 293-294. Cf. also W. M. Rossetti, Some Reminiscences, I, p. 219.

emancipated man, but had found it wanting. Perhaps W. M. Rossetti[1] was the closest to the truth about Swinburne when he suggested that Swinburne's attempt to be a democrat went against the grain of his background, education, and temperament:

> Swinburne belongs by birth and nurture to the aristocratic class; and, though he has put forth very advanced democratic and republican views, his temperament and demeanour witness to his origin.

V.

For a final look at some conservative commentary on the orientation of American literature, we turn to a few writers who are not first-rank critics but who still express some significant part of the conservative mind in the nineteenth century.

Among the major conservative critics and their critical journals there is a wide range of response and few if any clear-cut critical standards. The same is true of the lesser critics.

To begin with an oddity, consider Lord Strangford, a dilettante orientalist who tried to get off the shifting sands of Victorian transition and confusion by attaching himself to and preaching Persian mysticism. He saw in Whitman, of course, Persian characteristics. In a better and more knowledgeable world than republican America, Whitman might have been saved from "his sty of Epicurean autolatry";

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[1] Some Reminiscences, I, 219.

> We should have caught him early, sent him to study at Shiraz, and eventually set him to work on a bona fide metrical and rhythmical translation or reproduction of the glorious rolling hendecasyllabics of Jelâluddîn Rûmi....[1]

But enough of Lord Strangford.

Theodore Watts-Dunton[2] was more skillful than most of his contemporaries in explaining why a national literature was impossible in America. The problem, he argued, is not just that America is not natus but mere populus and therefore essentially an English colony. He saw a greater problem--one which is very much present in contemporary literature: the American mob is taught to hate the old world while the educated class increasingly feels a need for it. Thus the natural tendency will be a widening of the gap between artist and intelligentsia on the one hand and the democratic mass on the other. The danger in this situation is obvious: the badly needed influence of English civilization will be barred by popular sentiment. But Watts-Dunton did not think the situation hopeless. Should American writers manage to overcome these inherent difficulties, he concluded, they may even outdo England in the production of literature--but of English literature. On this basis we can understand Watts-Dunton's rejection of Whitman.[3]

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[1]"Walt Whitman," Pall Mall Gazette, XIII (Feb. 16, 1866), 134.

[2]"The Future of American Literature," Fortnightly Review, XLIX (June 1, 1891), 910-926.

[3]See Theodore Watts-Dunton, "Walt Whitman," Athenaeum, LXX (April 2, 1892), 436-7.

The Tory fear of democratic leveling of art and thought was put succinctly but moderately by W. E. H. Lecky, the historian. Lecky, though he was not a Tory, embodied much of the spirit of the protest of Victorian intellectuals against democracy and its consequences. His great work, Democracy and Liberty, was written from a distinctly conservative point of view and showed little hope for the future of democratic societies. "It is largely a doubt, a protest, and a regret."[1] But in spite of this spirit of melancholy protest, Lecky thought that Tocqueville had been too severe. He argued that America had, in fact, produced some good literature and fine art. The observation did not blind him, however, to the lack of quality and the "intellectual sterility" which so poorly fitted a great nation. His analysis, despite his own disclaimer, was similar to Tocqueville's:

> "...modern democracy is not favorable to the higher forms of intellectual life. Democracy levels down quite as much as it levels up. The belief in the equality of man, the total absence of the spirit of reverence, the apotheosis of the average judgment, the fever and the haste, the advertising and sensational spirit which American life so abundantly generates...are all little favourable to the production of great works of beauty or of thought, of long meditation, of sober taste, of serious, uninterrupted study.[2]

Lecky also saw a major consequence of the situation:

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[1] Dictionary of National Biography, Second Supplement (London, 1912), II, 435-440.

[2] W.E.H. Lecky, Democracy and Liberty (London, 1896), I, 108.

> No one can fail to observe how large a proportion of the Americans who have shown distinguished talent in literature and art have sought in European life a more congenial atmosphere than they could find at home.[1]

Most conservatives, as we have seen, rejected Whitman. Fredrick York Powell, Professor of Modern History at Oxford, joined the Quarterly as an exception. He was a man who shared none of Whitman's faith in democracy, a man who had "a Tory's distrust of [American] culture and civilization."[2] Yet he had nothing but respect for "the great man Whitman"[3] and named him "the only man I would cross the water to see."[4] He wrote Henley in 1891 that, outside of Whitman, American Literature was a "farce."[5] The explanation, however, is not difficult to discover: Powell, perhaps in spite of his Toryism, was a pronounced optimist who was attracted by Whitman's optimism. Still more significantly, there was between them a common view of history. Powell, according to his biographer, Oliver Elton, "seemed, like Whitman, to define evil as the perishable element in the world."[6]

There remain for our consideration two conservative estimates of Henry James. Lady F. P. Verney,[7] with Howells and James

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[1] Democracy and Liberty.

[2] Oliver Elton, Fredrick York Powell: A Life (Oxford, 1906), 21-22.

[3] Ibid., p. 135. [4] Ibid., p. 122.

[5] Ibid., p. 135. [6] Ibid., p. 409.

[7] "The Americans as Painted by Themselves." Contemporary Review, XLVI (Oct., 1884), 543-555.

especially in mind, added one more to the pile of comments about America's need for a past. But she apparently did not realize that precisely this was one of James's themes, that much of his drama was built on the clash of American innocence and European experience. To her it seemed a deficiency in James himself, a deficiency that he exemplified rather than one that he explored. This is one of the many confusions which denied James a sympathetic hearing by conservative critics. After making the totally ignorant observation that James cannot expect women like Isabella Archer to be "taken to the homes and hearts of the British Aristocracy," the review moves on:

> The almost entire absence of an ideal of any kind, in men and women alike, of any poetic feeling of character, is strange in so young a literature. Society and its representatives in America seem to have jumped at a bound into the somewhat blase, artificial, conventional stage of that in the old world, but without the charm and grace which being to the manner born gives it in Europe.... The unconscious enrichment of the imagination of a people, a nation with no past must do without.

Without the smug English aristocratic complacency, James would surely agree.

One of three books on Henry James to appear in his own lifetime was written by the authoritarian, anti-democratic conservative Ford Maddox Ford (then Hueffer).[1] Like the mind of his own greatest character, Christopher Tietjens, Ford's mind had the

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[1]Ford Maddox Hueffer, Henry James: A Critical Study (London, 1913).

instincts and sensibilities of "the last English Tory." He was at the same time, of course, a brilliant experimental stylist who moved from his Pre-Raphaelite background through Flaubert and James and Conrad to his own stream-of-consciousness impressionism. Perhaps he ought to be considered in Chapter XIV rather than here; but he has his place in this chapter because his essentially feudal outlook weighed heavily in his estimate of James. He saw James, as he saw himself, as a dispassionate viewer and impressionistic reporter of "the Parade's end."

Indeed, it is the Tory cast of mind that drew Ford into his one great misjudgment of James. He identified James's outlook too closely with his own. James, he thought, was steeped in disillusionment, a disillusionment beyond that of Turgenev and Flaubert. His entire book on James is colored by this notion. The theory inspired a brilliant defense (and penetrating analysis) of James by a young critic named Dixon Scott (see Chapter XIV).

That one misunderstanding of Ford's is significant. The conservative mind often failed to see the kinship between itself and the work of Henry James; Ford saw more kinship than there really was, as Dixon Scott was quick to point out.

In approaching James, Ford identified himself as "an upholder of the Feudal system."[1] If the kind of life James depicts, he wrote,

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[1]Hueffer, op. cit., p. 65.

> if this life, which is the best our civilisation has to show, is not worth the living; if it is not pleasant, cultivated, civilised...then, indeed, Western civilisation is not worth going on with...

Such life had to be preserved--partly because this upper class of James's must be the model of the lower classes.[1] Because of the way in which James had caught this theme, he was not only "the greatest of living writers and in consequence, for me, the greatest of living men,"[2] but he was also "the greatest servant of the State now living."[3]

Ford did not mean that James was didactic; he was more the artist for having no public aims. His American birth was "a golden spoon in his mouth," for it gave him complete freedom in penetrating Europe.[4] It gave him the device of detached narration, a "singular pitilessness" in regard to his characters which was "the secret of his greatness."[5]

Still, Ford thought James did have a mission, "just one immense mission--the civilising of America."[6] His purpose in coming to the old world was

> to find a milieu, an atmosphere, upon which America might safely mould hers--an atmosphere in which wise and sympathetic duchesses and countesses said always the right thing, observed the 'old forms and pleasant rites' ....

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[1] Hueffer, op. cit., p. 61. [2] Ibid., p. 7.

[3] Ibid., p. 68. [4] Ibid., p. 124.

[5] Ibid., pp. 24-26. [6] Ibid., p. 94.

The touch of sarcasm was intended; for it was Hueffer's conviction that James, although his mission was noble, ended in delusion; he found only meaninglessness.[1]

Even though James's mission ended in delusion, Ford thought that James, "the greatest of living men," had determined the direction that modern literature should take. In James's materials as well as in his manner Ford found the richness and depth that art needed. If he thought it necessary for the Old World to look to the New, it was not for a free, emancipated, democratic literature but for a fresh sense of the drama and meaning of Europe. It was the Americans who could best restore this sense. In another book, Ford worked again at the question of resources for modern literature and credited the Americans with the greater responsibility for developing, largely through Poe and James, the European "mainstream" of literature. America, he argued, is closer to the mainland of Europe than is Britain. The American writer must seek out his resources there. Largely through James, American literature was becoming freshly American and yet French in manner. Ford's example was young Stephen Crane--who could read no French but confessed to Ford that he had "read ol' man James."[2]

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[1]Hueffer, Henry James: A Critical Study, 140-141.

[2]Ford Maddox Hueffer, Thus to Revisit (London, 1921), 102-128.

Obviously, Ford saw little hope in the movement for westward orientation. That he saw Henry James as a prophet who was blazing a trail for modern literature is obvious in his critical study of James--and even more obvious in his own novels, especially the four Tietjens novels.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CONSERVATIVE PERIODICALS

John Morley thought the reviews to be "the center for the best observation of fresh-flowing currents of thought, interest, and debate" in the nineteenth century.[1] The claim has a touch of the kind of hyperbole we might expect from one of the greatest of Victorian journalists. Especially in scanning the literary criticism tucked away in the thousands of volumes of Victorian periodicals, we are reminded of the limitations and temporality of periodical publication. Anyone who can count even a half-dozen hours spent in looking through back numbers of the Quarterly, the Westminster, or the Pall Mall Gazette will feel attracted to Henry James's remark to Stevenson: "Nothing lifts its hand in these islands save blackguard party politics. Criticism is of an abject density and puerility--it doesn't exist...."[2]

But Morley is partly right. Even in literature and cultural theory one can find revealing things in the journals. The trick is simple: keep an eye out for drifts and trends, for sudden shifts and contradictions, for the bizarre and the incisively intelligent--and let the remaining ninety per cent fly on past.

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[1] Quoted from Morley's Memoirs by Merle Bevington, The Saturday Review (New York, 1941), ii.

[2] Henry James, Letters, I, 139.

The cultural conservatives, perhaps more than any other group in Victorian England, had their party periodicals. The king of them all was, of course, the Quarterly--strongly and deliberately a Tory political mouthpiece. There was also Blackwood's Magazine, a monthly which specialized in slashing, stinging attacks. The Saturday Review was not officially Tory, and it was less "political" and more literary than the Quarterly and Blackwood's; but its tone was generally Peel Tory. Its fear of the democratic "mob" was extreme, and turned the magazine against Disraeli.[1] The Edinburgh Review remained throughout the century the staunch voice of the old Whigs. In a sense this makes it a "liberal" periodical; but in literature it was, as we shall see, deeply conservative. It falls more naturally into a chapter on conservative periodicals. The Nineteenth Century, like the Saturday Review, was without official editorial policy, but its tone and spirit was generally anti-liberal Tory democrat. The National Review was a late-century throwback to Tory traditionalism.

I.

We could hardly expect Whitman to gain much favorable attention from the venerable old Quarterly. Up to the middle of the century, it had been as hostile to American writing as had Blackwood's, regarding democracy as an evil not to be trusted and its

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[1] Cf. Merle Bevington, The Saturday Review.

literature as insignificant. It was, after all, a journal devoted to defending the Established Order and the interests of the landed aristocracy. Under the editorship of Crocker, it had lamented the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832. Still, we must remember that the Quarterly was often (though Crocker was not) more Burkean than reactionary; that it had championed the Lake School; that it was more receptive to novelty in literature than was its rival, the Whig Edinburgh--because, Professor Graham suggests, it had to "differ somehow" from the Edinburgh; that Whitwell Elwin, who replaced Crocker in 1856, was a renegade Whig who became a moderate, flexible Tory under the gentle influence of Newman; and that the second half of the century saw its pages graced with the writings of Matthew Arnold, Mark Pattison, Thackeray, Harriet Martineau, John Addington Symonds, Swinburne, Austin Dobson, Bertrand Dobell, and Sir Sidney Lee.[1]

The fact is, the Quarterly praised Whitman. With precocious perceptiveness, it attacked his poses; it found his hostility to art inexcusable; fortunately, the reviewer pointed out, his performance has an accidental art of its own. In fact, "in creative force and imaginative vigour Whitman stands, in our opinion, first among American poets."[2]

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[1] Cf. Walter Graham, English Literary Periodicals (New York, 1930), 245-250; Quarterly Review (Centennial issue), CCXI (July, 1909), 279-324.

[2] CLXIII (Oct., 1886), 390-392.

Underlying this judgment is a rarely articulate understanding of the split character of American literature. In a keen and intelligent article, the Quarterly[1] examined the question of the orientation of American literature. It noticed the two schools forming in America--the "cultured school" and the "democratic school." The cultured school, says the anonymous writer, produces flowers bleached by culture. There is in this literature mastery of art-forms, refined thought, heightened moral tone, fluency, and crispness; but there is "little depth of light and shade." The soil in which it grows is never rank or coarse, but neither is it rich or deep. This literature lacks gusto, relish of life; "dainty perfection of expression is no substitute for stimulating thought." The Quarterly's preference is for the literature of the democratic school. Earlier in the century, conditions were not right for this literature. The nationalist movement in America was premature. "Republicanism produced equality, but it was an equality of mediocrity.... An unlimited right of private judgment led, not to independence but to idolatry of the aggregate mass." But now the times are ready for a flourishing of significant literature from the democratic school. Ease, leisure, refinement, and culture have slowly grown and matured in America. There is a new confidence, reflected by Whitman, and less overshadowing by Britain. The new literature is here; it is full of human interest,

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[1] Quarterly Review, CLXIII (Oct., 1886), 363-94.

a realistic literature. This literature, the article concludes, will probably set the pace for the modern world; it better meets the needs of the modern world.

If it seems inconsistent for a Tory periodical to support Whitman's isolationist and democratic orientation while looking down with detached amusement at the attempt for a "cultured" American literature, at least the inconsistency is fairly consistent. Up until 1900, the Quarterly remained cool towards James. Its best study of him serves well as a summary of the accumulated reviews. It is found in a well-packed twenty-eight page article on "American Novels."[1]

This article appeared shortly after Howell's unwise adulation of James at the expense of Dickens and Thackeray. For this reason, some of its acidity may have to be discounted.

The Quarterly saw no good reason for James's attachment to Europe. It again affirmed the Quarterly's faith in the westward orientation of American literature. It pointed to the boundless range of opportunities for the writer in New England, the Spanish settlements, the West, and the Civil War.[2] Most American writers, the article suggests, "owe too much to European 'culture' or influences." Only Bret Harte is freed from this indictment.[3] The American writer is really in an ideal situation;

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[1] CLV (Jan., 1883), 201-229.

[2] Ibid., pp. 202-3. [3] Ibid., p. 203.

> It must be his own fault if he does not succeed, for the opportunities before him are boundless. America is the land of Romance....[1]

In fact, the Quarterly did not regard James as an American novelist at all. Poe had already begun diverting the stream of American literature; even so, it was carried on by William Gilmore Simms, Sylvester Judd, Cooper, Paulding, and John P. Kennedy.[2] But the novels of the "new school" "are not American and are not novels."[3] The work of a real American novelist must be "soaked in national feeling." It must have the tang of Charles Brockden Brown: "He was a true American, for whom America was good enough to live in."[4]

The article is finally a strong plea for simple realism and the use of native materials in American literature. James, the writer complains, is artificial. He does not know Americans. "The great masters of the craft"--Dickens and Thackeray have doubtless again come to mind--"did not find real life insipid."[5] James does. His books, as a result, are "dull, unspeakably dull"; they are all pill and no sugar, replete with "artificial mannerisms" and "tawdry smartness." Portrait of a Lady (which has no beginning, middle, or end, no plot or story, "not a single interesting incident in it") yields an almost endless elaboration of

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[1] CLV, 202.

[2] Ibid., 206-7. [3] Ibid., 209. [4] Ibid., 202.

[5] Ibid.

conversation simply because this filled space, and space, for an author appearing serially, meant money.[1]

Perhaps this is enough to indicate an odd turning of the tables in the Quarterly: a British Tory organ praising Whitman, the democratic bard, and rejecting James, the refined and cultured traditionalist. The grounds in both cases were grounds essentially compatible with democratic art; a concern for the reading masses is reflected in the myriad of words like sugar, story, interest, national feeling.

Strangely enough, these comments on American literature appeared while the Quarterly was under a good deal of domination by Lord Salisbury, a strong Tory who thoroughly disliked Disraeli because he felt that Disraeli was leading the party into a dangerous flirtation with democracy which would rush the nation towards anarchy.

Stranger still, by the time the Quarterly revised its opinion of James and praised him as a major novelist, it had already lost much of its Tory identity. After 1900, the old principle of anonymity (and a good deal of conservative editorial policy) had died. In 1903 and again in 1910 the Quarterly published signed articles on James; now he had come into favor.

In a twenty-two page article, "The Novels of Mr. Henry James," Oliver Elton,[2] skillfully analyzed the development of

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[1]CLV, 214.

[2]CXCVIII (Oct., 1903), 358-80.

James up to The Wings of the Dove. He presented James as one of the great artists of the century and displayed shrewd insight into James's aims, limitations, themes, and techniques. The article reveals a flash of insight into James's dispatriation:

> He is not a cosmopolitan even yet; he never was one. He is better; he understands other countries, but does not adopt them; for his last heroine, the 'Dove,' is the soul of New England, his own country.[1]

Morton Fullerton, one of the best of James's critics among his contemporaries, completely reversed the stand that the Quarterly had taken on James twenty-seven years earlier. In a more liberal Quarterly, Fullerton made a more aristocratically oriented defense of James against the charges of Philistine and democratic critics.[2] Like Elton, he sensed the necessity of James's dispatriation. It was demanded by a new and fruitful literary subject: the meeting of the New World and the Old. First of all, wrote Fullerton, James has been

> the historiographer of that vast epic--the modern Iliad, when its peripatetic and romantic elements do not make it more like an Odyssey--the clash between two societies, the mutual call of two sundered worlds....[3]

But more important is the reversal of standards, the defense of James in the name of a more traditional and aristocratic sense of art. He thought it inevitable that James would be ignored "in this period of democratic neglect of all the superiorities." For

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[1] CXCVIII, 358.

[2] "The Art of Henry James," CCXII (April, 1910), 393-409.

[3] Ibid., 398.

the mind of the modern reader, blunted by mass literature,

> made myopic by the thin transcriptions of life which pass for fiction, has no perception of tone, depth, richness, and completeness of representation.[1]

James's devotion to art in a democratic and commercial age was to Fullerton nobly exemplary. James could resist the drifts and pressures. He even had the courage, at the end of an illustrious career, to follow the dictates of his artistic sense and change his style.

> The great danger that besets the artist is the peril of popularity, and the all-too seductive appeal to outdo himself, to abound still more in the same sense. It is at his risk that he leaves his admirers in the lurch.... The secret of continued success is not to disturb the spectator's association of ideas.... It requires courage to ignore this instant value of the trade-mark; for not only gratified vanity but uneasy self-criticism urges that the public may be right. Henry James had this high courage; and to it we owe the fact that he has become...one of those '_premiers parmi les plus grands_' with whom Hugo classed Balzac.[2]

II.

The _Quarterly_ saw value and significance in Whitman and finally came around to respecting James. We can surmise that in the shift of critical standards after 1900 it would have turned against Whitman. But neither of these authors fared well at any time in the pages of another Tory-leaning journal, the _Saturday Review_.

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[1] "The Art of Henry James," 397.

[2] _Ibid._, 395-396.

Founded in 1855 by a Peel Tory, its conservative but non-partisan tone was set in the early volumes by the articles of Walter Bagehot. The Saturday acknowledged the need of reforms, but jealously guarded English institutions and fought off fearfully any concessions to "the democratic mob." It called continually for the preservation of institutions and for minority rule because "the offspring of democracy is tyranny."[1] Disraeli was despised as insincere, Gladstone as a traitor to learning and tradition who was bending the knee to radicalism and the mob. The British laborer would have to become considerably advanced in education and independence before the nation could listen to Bright; until then "the British Constitution very sensibly provides that he shall be governed by his betters."[2]

But the Saturday became gradually less political and more literary, broadening and liberalizing its policy at the same time. Indeed, for a five-year period in the 1890's the review was edited by the radical Frank Harris, and featured the writings of Shaw, Wells, Symonds, Beerbohm, and Cunninghame-Graham. Still, prior to Harris's stint, the movement away from conservatism was slow and gradual.

As Merle Bevington's study of the Saturday shows, in its early years it expressed in general an aristocratic contempt for

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[1] VII (Jan. 8, 1859), 35.

[2] XVII (Jan. 16, 1864), 71-72.

American vulgarity and crudeness. But after a few years "its critiques indicated considerable respect for American literature and its future possibilities."[1]

The Saturday's early attitude towards American literature seems to fluctuate between amused contempt for bloodless imitations and actual outrage at the vulgarity of traditionless Yankees. Coventry Patmore complained of "the vast dead level of decent verse, such as happily we shall in vain look for in any other time or country," and cited Longfellow's "Excelsior" and "The Psalm of Life" as being "remarkable chiefly for blunders in morality, confusion of thought, bombastic and commonplace sentiment, and inaccuracy of observation and expression." Democracy, Patmore argued, was responsible for the watering down.[2] A year later, the Saturday sneered at the imitativeness of American fiction, a reflection of "a shallowness and thinness in the American character." Again the reviewer moved on to the question of orientation in American culture:

> It will seem a paradox only to very shallow and very hasty observers to assert that a landed aristocracy, an established church, and a vast and complicated system of proprietary rights and dignities...are amongst the strongest of all guarantees for independence and strength of mind.[3]

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[1]Kincheloe, p. 23, summarizing Bevington.

[2]IV (Aug. 15, 1857), 165-166.

[3]VI (Aug. 23, 1858), 215-216.

The paradox is a fairly profound one: if America were more like England, her literature would be less imitative of English literature, more "native" and national. It might be noted that the conservative Saturday had a warmer regard for the distinctively American literature of Lowell, Artemus Ward, and Mark Twain than it had for the more conventional literature of Longfellow, Irving, and Bryant.

The change in attitude towards American literature began after the Civil War, in 1868. The previous year, the Saturday began running monthly articles on American writing. But in this early period, when the critiques were marked by a demand for American originality and yet by a conviction that democratic institutions stunted literature, the Saturday gave three reviews to Whitman--"original" and "democratic." All three of them were decidedly unfavorable.

The first of the reviews of Whitman, which appeared in Volume I and was one of four British reviews of the first edition of Leaves of Grass, was by Sir Henry Sumner Maine. Maine, an influential member of the original Saturday group and a prolific contributor to the review, was one of the keenest of conservative intellectuals of his time.[1] A talented disciple of Burke, he registered his opposition to American-type democracy in a still-valuable treatise, Popular Government. In his articles on

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[1]For a discussion of Maine's conservatism, see Benjamin E. Lippencott, Victorian Critics of Democracy.

American literature, Maine demonstrated his conviction that the social structure of America precludes literature. For Whitman he had no use at all, and suggested that anyone coming into possession of a copy of Leaves of Grass ought to burn it.[1] The other reviews of Whitman before 1868 were equally hostile. Only once did the Saturday except Whitman from its attack on "feeble and derivative" American poetry.[2] When W. M. Rossetti's edition of Whitman appeared in 1868, the Saturday took comfort in the belief that literature would not be harmed by it, for Whitman is strong "only in the sense in which an onion is strong."[3]

But from 1868 to the end of the century, while the Saturday was finding hope and some achievement in American literature generally, it maintained its stand on Whitman. Largely because his writing was "obscene," he did not deserve the financial help for which Buchanan was pleading in 1876.[4] In 1889, in a review of November Boughs,[5] the old Toryism is as strong as ever. The reviewer found it necessary to "confess that this strayed reveller...is a poet still, and one of the remarkably few poets that his country has produced." But his country remains impotent,

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[1] Saturday Review, I (March 15, 1856), 394.

[2] XXIV (Sept. 21, 1867), 383-4.

[3] XXV (May 2, 1868), 590.

[4] XLI (March 18, 1876), 360-1.

[5] LXVII (March 2, 1889), 261.

starved by its own democratic structure.

> So far is it from being the case that the United States of America present a higher type of civilization and of humanity, that we should count the grey New Yorker rather lower than the European child. Democracy, instead of being a great and beautiful goddess, is a dirty, half-witted trull.

The muse Whitman invokes is precisely this half-witted trull:

> If (Whitman) will, in season and out of season, praise an irrational variety of polity, which has never yet been tried with real success in any age of the world's history, he must lay his account with harsh answers from people who utterly decline to sacrifice the freedom of forty-nine wise men to the tyranny of fifty-one fools.

That there must be a new modern literature the Saturday vigorously denied. There is no such thing as progress in poetry.

> No; let us, if it be ours to lecture on poetry, hold up Walt Whitman as much as anyone pleases for an awful example of the fate that waits, and justly waits, on those who think (idle souls!) that there is such a thing as progress in poetry, and that because you have steam-engines and other things which Solomon and Sappho had not, you may, nay must, neglect the lessons of Sappho and Solomon.

Henry James fared only slightly better with the Saturday's reviewers. In a way this is surprising. Hawthorne had been well received by them, even when attacking English women in Our Old Home.[1] And in 1867, the Saturday[2] seemed ready for James in a way in which no other review was ready for him. It detected a new maturity making its way into American letters; the vehicle

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[1] Bevington, pp. 270-2.

[2] XXIV (Nov. 9, 1867), 607-8.

for this maturity was cosmopolitanism. The reviewer found this cosmopolitanism, this maturity, in Howells' Venetian Life. He found it also in Holmes's Guardian Angel, which won the reviewer's praise because it was clearly the work of one of the few Americans "who have clearly got beyond the pupil stage, and established claims to be judged from a cosmopolitan point of view." Then too, James as a stylist might have satisfied the reviewer who complained nine months earlier[1] about American books having

> certain blemishes of style, a certain slovenliness of grammar and clumsiness of expression, derived from the colloquial idioms of the country.

But the Saturday missed James. It missed the fact that he was attempting to establish a European orientation for American literature. For one thing, the review was distracted from the center of James by its persistent regard for moral decency. Thus, while making the first comparison of James and Turgenev and noting the "delicacy" of James's treatment of his subject, the reviewer of The American[2] raised his eyebrow at the career of Mlle. Nioche, "not a pleasant theme." James's French Poets and Novelists was attacked for giving eight pages to the love affair described in Baudelaire's Elle et Lui (all of Baudelaire, the Saturday sniffed, is not worth this much space);[3] In the Cage was dismissed as

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[1] XXIII (Feb. 23, 1867), 247.

[2] XLIV (June 16, 1877), 433.

[3] XLV (April 20, 1878), 504-5.

"unclean."[1]

The Saturday said a great deal about James, but little of it was out of the ordinary. The reviewers did not sense the relationship between James's novels and the conservative concern for standards in modern art. In James's Hawthorne, where the problem of orientation cannot be missed, the Saturday simply agreed that the solitary writer, without "class," was in for a hard time.[2] It missed the theme of the dedicated artist in The Tragic Muse[3] and thought that James, in The Lesson of the Master, was trying to say simply that good authors cannot be married.[4] It joined the noisy parade of critics who found James "too highly cultivated" to deal in "the elementary feelings of human nature";[5] he lacked story and real life; he tried too hard to be "exact about nothing";[6] his stories seemed unfinished.[7] It got in its lick about James's sentence structure, dubbing the James sentence as "the trailing and over-jointed abomination."[8]

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[1] LXXXVI (Sept. 3, 1898), 320.

[2] XLIX (Jan. 10, 1880), 60.

[3] LXX (Aug. 2, 1890), 141.

[4] LXXIII (May 14, 1892), 575.

[5] XLVII (May 3, 1879), 560.

[6] "The Novelist's Art and Mr. Henry James," XCV (Jan. 17, 1903), 79-80.

[7] LXVIII (July 13, 1889), 48.

[8] LXXVI (July 8, 1893), 46.

III.

The comments of Blackwood's Magazine on American literature reveal something of the stolid British middle class capitalist-conservatism at work. If Blackwood's is Tory, we must note again the different meanings that this word had in the nineteenth century. Its alignment was not with the aristocracy, but with the new and powerful middle class. It was pro-laissez-faire and blatantly anti-intellectual. It rejected Carlyle and Ruskin because they would dangerously increase that grim menace to the middle classes, government regulation. Unlike many of the organs of the middle class, however, it attacked Darwin, Renan, and Huxley, opposed Mill's empiricism, and held to Biblical infallibility. It even attacked Arnold's Literature and Dogma.

Blackwood's is almost as interesting for what it overlooked as for what it reviewed. It was, after all, a hard, practical, "serious" review. It gave little space to novels. Dickens, in the whole of the century, was reviewed only three times; Thackeray and Meredith once; Hardy not at all. Poetry was almost gleefully flaunted. In Memoriam, Dramatis Personae, Empedocles on Etna, Arnold's Poems, Second Series and New Poems, and all of Swinburne and Meredith went unnoticed. Strange for a "Tory" journal, there were no reviews of Shooting Niagara or Culture and Anarchy.[1]

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[1]MacDonald Williams, "Blackwood's Magazine: A Selective and Critical Bibliography of Reviews" in Diss. Abs., XX, 2815-17.

Blackwood's did not deign to mention Whitman. It did on occasion review Henry James. In a long article in 1879,[1] it attempted to estimate James on the basis of Roderick Hudson, The American, The Europeans, Daisy Miller, and An International Episode. The reviewer's rather strange conclusion is that, while James is not quite a flag-waver, he is to be suspected of "the very warm and determined purpose to elevate his countrymen in the eyes of the world." The stories have some success as "essays of national revelation," but James tips the scales in favor of his American characters. The charge was repeated three years later.[2] James was accused of trying to show "the predominance of the great American race, and the manner in which it has over-run and conquered the Old World." But, sneered the reviewer, as though he were catching James for the first time in a terrible blunder, most of James's characters--all of them in Portrait of a Lady--are really anti-republicans, in Europe to escape republicanism. A year later Blackwood's accused both James and Howells of American provincialism.[3]

IV.

The files of the Edinburgh Review serve well to remind us

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[1] CXXVI (July, 1879), 100-107.

[2] CXXXI (March, 1882), 375.

[3] CXXXIII (Jan. 1883), 136-161.

that criticism cannot be stereotyped as "liberal" or "conservative." When it was founded in 1802, it was, of course, a Whig instrument. Literature was one of its legs, Jeffry told Walter Scott, "but its right leg is politics."[1] It remained Whig throughout the century, long after Whiggery had been attenuated into Liberalism. When it was founded, it was no more a part of the reactionary fear of French Revolution change than it was an advocate of French Revolution radicalism. It kept this balance throughout the century. The best and firmest note the Edinburgh struck was the note of moderation. The controlling mind of the Edinburgh was not imaginative; it was not carried by enthusiasms; but unlike many middle-class liberal minds, it was also suspicious of theories. Walter Bagehot's cautious restatement of the Edinburgh's policy catches it just right: the review was built on the conviction that "the present world can and should be quietly improved."[2] The word quietly is important. It stood for "plain Whig principles" instead of radicalism, and the standard was severe enough to make the Edinburgh suspicious even of Gladstone.

In fact, the Edinburgh managed very often to detach itself from the political, moral, and literary standards of the rising middle class. This is strikingly apparent in its attitudes towards American literature, as we shall see. Six years before

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[1]Quoted by Cairns, II, 12.

[2]Works and Life of Walter Bagehot, ed. Russell Barrington (London, 1915), II, 62.

Tocqueville, it had raised the question of the tyranny of the majority; in reviewing Tocqueville, it had singled out not democracy but "commercial, middle-class" forces as the real threat to human society, and had suggested as a cure for America and the modern world the girding and strengthening of "an agricultural class, a leisured class, and a learned class."[1] The Edinburgh was seldom in a mood to let the middle classes have their way in shaping the new and shifting world.

Still, the Edinburgh reflected a good deal of what we now call "typically Victorian" hostility to change and novelty in literature. Until 1829, when Macvey Napier replaced Jeffry as editor, the review was stamped with an emaciated classicism. Campbell and Rogers were valued above the romantics. Some of this unbending fealty to dying critical standards remained throughout the century. New ideas in literature were as disconcerting as noisy new doctrines in politics. It is one of the many paradoxes of the century that the Tory Quarterly was really more hospitable to novelty than the more liberal Edinburgh.

What did such a review, with such critical standards, make of American civilization and literature? To begin with, the Edinburgh did take a great deal of interest in America. Tradition has it that the review's blue and buff colors were modeled after George Washington's uniform. It attacked British participation

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[1]See above, p. 62.

in the War of 1812,[1] tried to correct the image of America from the distorting onslaught of forty-four different travel books, commended American public education as its "distinguishing excellence,"[2] applauded the sectarianism of American religious life,[3] saw great opportunities for a nation free from feudalism[4]--and yet felt that American democracy had little chance of succeeding. The feeling, in brief, was that legislation _for_ the people is good, but legislation _by_ the people is questionable.[5]

The same mixture of keen interest and hesitancy can be traced in the _Edinburgh's_ century-long span of comments on American literature. American books were not reviewed extensively because the review's policy was to deal only with those books which could be made the text of more general essays. But a consistent theme runs through most of the review articles touching on American literature. It is a theme that might be more natural to the _Quarterly_, for its essence is that literature requires leisure--perhaps even a leisured class. Second to this theme is another: that American literature is merely imitative, lacking in national peculiarity.

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[1] XX, 451.

[2] LVI (1833), 461.

[3] X (1807), 199.

[4] XL (1824), 430.

[5] _Ibid_.

Already in 1809 the Edinburgh pointed out that Americans were too pre-occupied to produce a literature.[1] A year later the review had comparatively kind words for Joel Barlow's bombastic and generally ridiculed long poem, The Columbiad.[2] The reviewer had his eye peeled for something "distinctive." However, he also commented upon the environmental restrictions against which Barlow and Timothy Dwight had to struggle. The Edinburgh's plea for something distinctive from free America and its constant complaint that American writers were imitators were often followed by comments on the absence of tradition and past in American life. One reviewer quite typically found a want of "the sublimity of moral associations" and of "a long and picturesque train of old recollections and associations."[3] Still, the literature should not be imitative, should not rely on European associations. And Poe was too much for the moral sensibilities of the Edinburgh: he was visciously attacked as a worthless Bohemian vagabond, a "delirious drunken pauper."[4] Bryant and Lowell, on the other hand, were not distinctive enough.[5]

The Edinburgh's whole attitude towards American literature

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[1] XV, 24.

[2] XVII (1810), 321-326.

[3] L (1829), 127.

[4] CVII (1858), 419-442.

[5] CXCI (1900), 181.

was in nicely sensitive balance between the demands for a new and distinctive voice and the respect for tradition and roots and "a class." Whitman was a vigorous challenge to that balance. But for some reason--perhaps for this very reason--the review chose to ignore his work for fifty-four years. It finally got round to him in 1910, but said little except that Whitman had fallen into "the snare of romanticism."[1] In overlooking Whitman and Twain, the Edinburgh missed the very distinctiveness it was so impatiently waiting for.

Despite the fact that he was Europeanized, James was unquestionably distinctive. His books also lend themselves as text to a possible Edinburgh article on the need for classes in the modern world. And indeed, the review recognized both these characteristics in James. In an 1882 review,[2] the Edinburgh argued again the need of a cultivated class in America and showed with some effectiveness how this need was given constant expression in the work of Henry Adams, Howells, and James. James, said the reviewer, commenting on The Europeans, had to bring Europeans into his American work to give Boston society "needful animation." His problem was a severe one: he had to write in a cultural wilderness. And at this point the reviewer saw something of James's distinctiveness: he is authentically American, and a patriot of

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[1] CCXI (1910), 347.

[2] CLVI (1882), 170-203.

his country, but one who realizes that he cannot in good conscience make a home-spun novel readable. For James, of course, this was only a small part of the problem. But at least the Edinburgh saw a real part of it.

Perhaps James was too thin to be part of the Edinburgh's steady diet. Whatever the reason, he was reviewed only once again, this time[1] after James had entered his "major phase" and after the critical attitude towards him was shifting. But the Edinburgh's twenty-six page article says surprisingly little, most of it ordinary. Significantly, the reviewer set out to discover "how much of life" there is in the novels of James. He found increasing power and delicacy in the chain of seventeen novels; he praised James's eye for "involutions of the mind"; he found amplitude and range; but like so many critics, he was disturbed by James's "lack of depth."

V.

We should look briefly at some select notices from other Tory-inclined journals: The Dublin Review, The National Review, The Nineteenth Century, and the British Quarterly.

James's art-versus-life theme usually went unnoticed as a statement of his vision of the times. The Dublin Review,[2] a

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[1] CXCXII (1903), 59-85.

[2] XXIV (Oct., 1890), 466-7.

conservative Irish Catholic journal, did notice the theme and hit it hard. It seemed to the reviewer an apology for "professional aesthetes." The disgust for Gabriel Nash is understandable, for James was obviously satirizing him; but the review went on to castigate Nick Dormer, describing him as

> a contemptible creature with aesthetic proclivities, who throws up a promising parliamentary career to potter over an easel....

The Dublin, always sensitive to "immorality" in James, carried this theme right down through its last review of him in 1911.[1] The obscurity of James's style, the reviewer decided, was due simply to "moral confusion."

The British Quarterly found Whitman's poetry to be "prose" which is "feebler than Tupper and coarser than Swinburne at his coarsest."[2] It was one of the first reviews to recognize James's international theme,[3] but failed to see its implications; the reviewer thought "the moral" of the theme to be that if English nobles cannot marry American girls, then "it is not very honorable to entangle their affections."

The Nineteenth Century, a Tory Democrat review which was liberal in its attitude towards the laboring classes but anti-Liberal Party, published one good article on Whitman. By George C.

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[1] XLVIII (Jan. 1911), 200-201.

[2] LXXXII (Feb., 1885), 319.

[3] XLIX (April, 1879), 267.

Macaulay, it is a balanced, informative discussion of Whitman's art and thought.[1] But it does little to relate Whitman to the art and society of his times.

The National Review, an old-school traditionalist Tory journal edited by Alfred Austin, dismissed James as anaemic. With a surprising indulgence in middle class standards, probably reflecting some of the elan of the vitalism and imperialism which was beginning to move Kipling, the review called for some more "hearty English fare," some passion and "downright vulgarity."[2] More of the National's attitude towards American writing--this time on Whitman--can be found in an article on American poetry which Austin published[3] before the National was founded. In speculating on the poetry of the future, Austin mixed acidity with gloom. After discussing briefly Whitman's moral offensiveness, he sallied forth into democratic art and the westward orientation--for these seemed clearly to be ahead.

> As Mr. Rossetti reminds us, it has been said of Mr. Whitman by one of his warmest admirers, "He is Democracy." We really think he is--in his composition, at least; being, like it, ignorant, sanguine, noisy, coarse, and chaotic! Democracy may be, and we fear is, our proximate future; and it will, as a matter of course, bring its poetry along with it. The prospect is not an agreeable one; but, as a protection against both it and the present condition [of poetry], we

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[1] XII (Dec., 1882), 903-918.

[2] XIV (Oct., 1889), 167-170.

[3] "The Poetry of the Future," Temple Bar, XXVII (Oct., 1869), 314-327.

can always fall back upon the grand old masters of the Past, from whom it is quite certain that singers, whether insipid or insane, will never succeed in weaning the healthy opinion of mankind.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PROGRESSIVE VICTORIANS: THE MIDDLE CLASS, LIBERALS, AND RADICALS

Industrialization and the Reform Bills had created, by the second half of the nineteenth century, a totally new and still-changing society dominated by the middle classes. The very word industrial is a clue to the temperament of this society: a quality of human behavior had become institutionalized.

After the word transition, the key word was progress. Indeed, for the less reflective economic liberals the sense of transition never came to life; the idea of progress dominated everything. But when progress was the axiom, its corollaries had to be stated with words such as democracy, class, utility, freedom, society. Whatever the discussion, whatever the point of view taken in a discussion, some reference to the "progressive," "free," "democratic" society growing up in the social laboratory of the New World could be expected. The solid and stolid middle classes as well as the anti-middle class liberals and the social radicals felt compelled to look at America.

When the discussions of this transitory age veered towards art and culture and literature, the question demanded by the times was obvious: What kind of civilization, what kind of culture, what kind of art and literature should "progress" bring into being? Even after we exclude the social and cultural conservatives,

the answers to the question are surprisingly various. We can group them, however, into three general categories: the answers given by the conventional, moralistic, generally utilitarian "solid" middle class, by the moderate anti-middle class liberals, and by the radical social revolutionary democrats.

I.

The hard core of middle class Victorians was at the center of Victorian social life. But at the same time it counted for little in the culture and literature of the age. The middle classes were busy demanding and creating a market for and getting "popular culture." Their demands and standards certainly modified the real literature that the age produced; Tennyson and Dickens and even Arnold were part of the "Victorian compromise." But most of the enduring thought and art of the age was not engagée with the standards and outlook of the middle class. Even Tennyson was not, and surely Browning, Arnold, Carlyle, Newman, George Eliot, the Pre-Raphaelites, and Hardy were not. Writers were consciously either addressing or flaunting the middle class, but they were seldom wholly representative of it. Hence the important criticism, like the important thought and literature, comes from somewhere outside the solid center of Victorian society.

The solid middle class "Philistine" attitude towards culture and literature is well enough known. We will touch only briefly on that attitude as it related to American culture and literature. The valuable and worthwhile documents are hard to find because

even Victorian periodicals were in some way above or outside of (and were instructing or attacking) the solid middle class.

The middle class, too, for all its smugness and complacency and self-righteousness, had to look occasionally (over its fan, so to speak) at its bustling cousin in America. Tennyson, who often struck the right chord for the middle class hearth, caught the tone of interest in his "Hands all Round":

> Gigantic daughter of the West,
> We drink to thee across the flood...
> For art thou not of English blood?

American books, as we have seen, were tremendously popular in Victorian England.[1] The Victorian critics, conscious of the feelings of their middle class readers, pretty well abandoned slashing attacks on American literature by about 1850. The position they settled down to reflects the general attitude of the solid middle class. It has been summarized by Henderson G. Kincheloe:[2] they preferred literature which did not depart too far from the "normal" and usual in matter and manner; overwhelmingly, therefore, they preferred Longfellow and Holmes to Melville and Whitman and James. Really little more need be said.

We might pause for a moment to remind ourselves why the solid middle class Victorians brought American books into their

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[1] Cf. Gohdes, American Literature in Nineteenth Century England.

[2] "British Periodical Criticism of American Literature, 1851-1870." Thesis, Duke University, 1948.

parlors. They were not seeking ideological insights, as were the more radical liberals. They simply recognized that the United States, earlier than any other country in the world, had produced a literature which was entirely the product of a great middle class. It was a literature written for people, not for the salons and the aristoi. If we put ourselves in their place we can see that they would feel naturally what editors and teachers and scholars must tell us: that Emerson wrote for and about representative men rather than heroes; that Hawthorne wrote for children; that Poe preferred the short story to the poem because its products are more vast, "more appreciable by the mass of mankind";[1] that Mark Twain deliberately ignored the cultivated classes and, as he said, "hunted for bigger game--the masses."[2]

There were, of course, some standards other than mass appeal and readability and "the normal and usual." Another major standard, as everyone knows, was a rigid sense of moral purity. On these four grounds alone, Whitman would be ostracized and James quietly ignored. The Graphic can serve as an illustration of the taste to which it geared itself: Whitman was not mentioned at all. James was attacked at various times for his "high tone" and his "complex departures from the recognized methods of fiction";[3]

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[1] "On Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales," in Foerster and Charvat, American Poetry and Prose (Boston, 1952), p. 212.

[2] Letters, ed. A. B. Paine (New York, 1917), II, 527.

[3] XXXIX (June 29, 1889), 714.

for his preoccupation with "the bizarre and morbid in mental states";[1] for his solemnity and seriousness;[2] he has, the Graphic assured its readers, no appeal for the reader "who has no ambition to pose as 'superior.'"[3] Temple Bar found in James "a want of red blood" and thought him "too clever by half."[4] James's "pessimism" and "cynicism" were also offensive to the code; Temple Bar identified American literature with optimism and found Twain's humor "thoroughly American" because it is "never cynical."[5]

This is really enough. We will find the heavy weight of the middle class code overlaying the criticism of the more important reviews, reviews which in many ways transcended middle class mentality but never fully escaped middle class demands.

There were also the oddities and extremes of the middle class mind. The evangelicals and non-conformists, for example, had their little periodicals, dedicated to temperance and purity. One of them, the Congregationalist Eclectic Review, which seems to have liked Harriet Beecher Stowe and Whittier better than any other writers in the century, sailed into Melville at full speed for having said uncomplimentary things about hard-working

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[1] XI (March 27, 1875), 299.

[2] XXXIII (April 3, 1886), 378.

[3] Ibid.

[4] LXX (March, 1884), 388.

[5] XXXVII (Feb., 1873), 402.

Christian missionaries in Tahiti. And there was Arnold's straw-man, Sir Lepel Griffin, who disliked everything in American literature for opposite reasons (Whitman is a barbarian, Howells is "milk and water," and so forth) and thought that the thing most worth seeing in the United States was the pork-packing industry in Chicago. But there is no value to match the amusement of going into such things.

The solid middle class had narrow, utilitarian, didactic tastes. But these tastes were instrumental largely in the limitations they imposed upon the tastes of others. They were seldom elaborated or defended. The inhabitants of the solid middle class read the safe and popular Americans and gave little thought to the question of orientation.

II.

Not all Liberal commentary on American Literature was as smug and myopic as that in the Graphic. Even the utilitarian middle classes had their moments of intelligence; they were not all Bounderbies or Gradgrinds; Mrs. Grundy and Dr. Bowdler did not have the Victorian parlor to themselves. The sense of transition and the quest for orientation were stronger, of course, among those Liberals who could disassociate themselves from the merely mechanical or thoughtless standards of a self-interested class. Non-middle-class, and even anti-middle-class Liberals were in abundance, "liberal," yet distinguishable from the socialists.

Yet in many respects the Spectator does not represent much of a jump from the hard middle class core. In many ways an intelligent weekly, it tended to reduce art to a sub-department of morals. Apparently the first thing a reviewer was expected to look for in a new book was "immorality"; if he found it, his job was to let loose a pained outcry of moral indignation. Something of the solid middle class veneration for that which is practical and energetic is present in the Spectator files, too, particularly after the guiding mind of Richard Holt Hutton had left. It is in this late-century stage, for example, that the Spectator showed its disgust with Henry James's concern with such things as social class, things "which...have done little for England in comparison with the ships of the Pool and the spade of the engineer."[1]

Still, it would not be just to dismiss the Spectator on such grounds alone. In the twenty-odd years in which it was edited by Hutton and Meredith Townsend, it was generally a serious and intelligent periodical which had no partisan obligations but very definite Liberal leanings. It supported Gladstone until the Home Rule controversy in 1886 (and in exchange got his endorsement as "one of the few papers which are written in the fear and love of God."[2]). But its moralism, especially in Hutton's essays,

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[1]LVII (Feb. 2, 1884), 160.

[2]Quoted by Glyn N. Thomas, Richard Holt Hutton (Ann Arbor, 1949), 100.

transcended mere Victorian respectability. Hutton, who was one of the founders of the Metaphysical Society and a keen student of Newman, moved slowly from Unitarianism to High Anglicanism and very near to Roman Catholicism. Unlike the dispensers of middle class morality and respectability, Hutton built his ethics on a firm philosophical opposition to materialism. Hutton's higher philosophical purpose often broke through the rigid moralism of the paper. The depth and range of intellect in the paper makes it obvious that it was designed to be read not by the Philistines but by the cultured and educated.

This is not to suggest that the Spectator was free from excessive moralism--moralism at the expense of the larger criteria of literature. It scolded James for giving space in his French Poets and Novelists to Baudelaire, whose work seemed to the reviewer nothing but "gilded dunghills."[1] In reviewing The Europeans, it attacked the laxity of American morals, and somehow, incredibly, managed to identify the Baroness' "easy view" of marriage with New England culture.[2] James, indeed, was often attacked on the score of morality. Whitman was almost obliterated on the same score. The 1860 reviewer of Leaves of Grass suggested sarcastically that the cover of the book should have been decorated with phallic emblems, and the frontispiece should have been

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[1]LI (Aug. 24, 1878), 1076-7.

[2]LI (Oct. 26, 1879), 334-6.

a full-length portrait of Whitman, stark naked.[1]

But, moralism aside, what did the Spectator make of American literature? With what kind of sensitivity did this journal, liberal but non-utilitarian, with its eye on the drifts of the time in the realm of idea and belief, respond to the opposite orientations of Whitman and James?

For one thing, it could not quite remove itself from the growing insistence that literature should be interesting to and readable by the masses. Thus Hutton admired Longfellow for his "elemental simplicity"[2] while his magazine--perhaps Hutton himself--complained at great length of Whitman's confusion and obscurity.[3] James was often criticized as a "fine craftsman" who refuses to give his stories "the characteristic qualities of narration--simplicity, lucidity and a natural movement of incident."[4] Roderick Hudson seemed "dreary,"[5] The Bostonians tedious and long-winded.[6]

Much more significantly, the Spectator was ill at ease with the thinking that each of these writers represented. Neither of

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[1] XXXIII (July 14, 1860), 669.

[2] Reprinted in Hutton's Contemporary Thought and Thinkers (London, 1880), 76-87.

[3] LVII (July 21, 1883), 934.

[4] LXXV (Sept. 28, 1895), 405.

[5] LII (July 5, 1879), 854-5

[6] LIX (March 20, 1886), 388-9.

them offered the reviewers of the Spectator a tenable vision of reality to which man could go in retreat from the uncertainties of the age.

Whitman was regarded as being greatly over-rated. America, said the Spectator in 1860,[1] "is unreasonably impatient to possess a great national poet." The usual complaint about the lack of distinctiveness in American poetry is there; "all are exotics, and their roots are nurtured by pabulum imported from the old country." It is partly the eagerness for a distinctive poet that drives some "uncultured" Americans to make great claims for Whitman. But America's real difficulty is that the soil is not yet right for poetry; it has, in Holmes's phrase, "no sufficient flavour of humanity." At this point in the review the real attack on Whitman begins. It is not just some superficial sense of morality that makes Whitman unacceptable; his lawlessness and indecency spring from a mind that lacks understanding and "intellectual capital," and from Whitman's romantic notion that all is divine and that evil does not exist. Against this notion the Spectator protested with all its journalistic might. This was the wrong path, an idle dream at the foundation of Whitman's thought and form that made the whole structure sag and would finally bring it crashing down. America had to be patient and wait for her poet.

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[1] XXXIII (July 14, 1860), 669-670.

The Spectator attacked Whitman once again in 1883.[1] Again it seemed concerned that Whitman could attract a following. How could intelligent men regard as a prophet a man who is demonstrably "ignorant," who uses bad grammar, who has no manners, who knows no distinction between good and evil, whose days are "joined each to each in natural commonplace," and whose writing is saved from mere commonplace only by "its egotism, which makes it offensive"? The Spectator had an answer. Quoting Mill, the review explained that in an age of conformity the mere example of non-conformity is a great service. Whitman's defiance made him attractive. It was natural that he should receive momentary attention, but inevitable that he could not last. His distinctiveness and originality set him apart not just from Europe--the American poet should be somehow separate--but from reality itself.

In dealing with Henry James, the Spectator was still in search of something "distinctively" American. In its first review of James, it thought it had found "a peculiarly American flavour."[2] But the reviewer missed James's use of the international theme. By the time James's use of Europe and America was more obvious, the Spectator could not conceal its disappointment and anger. The reviewer found it "humiliating" to see this son of the New World in quest of the old and traditional and paying

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[1] LVII (July 21, 1883), 933-5.

[2] XLVII (July 3, 1875), 860.

his respects to old mansions and ruins and Tory landlords. "He takes delight most in that of which we are properly ashamed...."[1] While the Spectator's review of James's Hawthorne was highly commendatory, it noticed a great deal of annoying condescension in the author's attitude towards America, and suggested that the condescension comes as naturally to James as to Matthew Arnold.[2] Still later came a complaint of James's "blank neutrality of feeling" towards America.[3] It should be observed that the Spectator's lack of enthusiasm for James did not have its origin in the simple fact that he was out of sorts with middle-class liberal-democratic society in the New World. Hutton had praised Henry Adams' Democracy, for example, as a good delineation of the deadness and sterility of democratic social and political life.[4] The Spectator could tolerate criticism of the liberal world and its ideology. But it could not tolerate a rejection of the present for the past; nor could it tolerate James's (or for that matter Arnold's) detachment.

The Spectator's major objection to James was more deeply ideological. Ultimately he could do no more to light the way than could Whitman. The criticism here was again didactic, but it

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[1]LVII (Feb. 2, 1884), 100.

[2]LIII (Jan. 3, 1880), 18-19.

[3]LXI (Aug. 4, 1888), 1066-7.

[4]Reprinted in Contemporary Thought and Thinkers, I, 69-76.

struck far greater depth than the many complaints about sexual morality might at first suggest. The Spectator had often complained about James's pessimism. This was as unacceptable as Whitman's monistic optimism. The best and most revealing attack on James's pessimism is an article, apparently by Hutton himself, entitled "Thin Pessimism."[1] The occasion for the article was a remark that James had made in the Century Magazine about Emerson's "thin optimism." Cleverly and acutely, the Spectator traced out a line of Puritan degeneration in Carlyle, Emerson, and James. Carlyle's Puritan sense of evil and struggle gave him a "fierce pessimism." Emerson threw out the idea of evil but retained a Puritan faith in divinity, divine incursion into the temporal world. James, representing the last phase of degenerate Puritanism, sees evil, as does Carlyle, but has given up struggling against it. For James, man is helpless and cannot be redeemed by God; there is no divine intervention in the world of natural evil. James as artist, therefore, can only recreate with detachment a meaningless world.

There is, the Spectator affirms in a later review,[2] more of a plan to the world than Henry James thinks. Princess Casamassima is "the novel of a man who thinks the world is aimless, and loves to exaggerate that aimlessness in his own descriptions of it."

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[1] LVI (June 2, 1883), 702-3.

[2] LXXIX (Oct. 30, 1897), 603

It is basically a false metaphysics that drives James to his arridity, his elaborate but detached psychological probing, his impulse to create a world in which helplessness is universal.

By the time the Spectator had passed into other hands, the century was near its end. The Spectator, too, showed a change. Perhaps it was a violent reflex to the fin de siecle mood. In those topsy-turvy days at the turn of the present century, Robert Buchanan lost his faith in the great dream of a perfect society, and the Westminster somberly set St. Augustine to work on Whitman's philosophy of evil, and the liberalized Quarterly paid its respects to Tory-inclined Henry James. And the Spectator? It abandoned its philosophizing and became a hard-fisted if weaker-headed mouthpiece of middle class standards. In 1897 it dismissed James as "a beautifully dressed child making an elaborate mud-pie in the gutter." Four years later, after attacking the morality of The Sacred Fount, it complained that James's characters are never "in business," are "detached from the arena of action or struggle for life," and are never touched by political and economic questions.

> But Mr. Henry James, with imperturbable aloofness, continues, with unimpaired industry and unflagging interest, to apply his microscope to the sophisticated emotions of corrupt and luxurious idlers.[1]

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[1] LXXXVI (March 2, 1901), 318-19.

The Westminster Review slowly shifted its course during the century and dropped a few comments on American literature along the way. It began in 1824 as the official organ of the Benthamite radicals; its critics seemed to work in terms of a middle class Benthamite utopia, and tried to define the place of literature within it. Typical of its early period is John Stuart Mill's well-known review[1] of Coleridge's Works (1829), which sets forth the rather startling notion that Coleridge is a great poet because he desires to promote the happiness of the world, because his conclusions are logical, and because he treats human character psychologically. But by 1840 James Mill's influence was gone, and in 1851 the magazine was rejuvenated by John Chapman. It became less doctrinaire, and more broadly liberal. Also, paradoxically, it became less literary.[2]

The Westminster began its career with a devastating attack by James Mill on the Whiggery of the Edinburgh. Even after it shed much of its utilitarianism, its editorial position was distinctly more radical than that of its Whig rival. And yet the estimates it made of the literature coming out of the new, free, middle class world of America are not remarkably different from the Edinburgh's estimates. They are only fuller and more complete.

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[1] Westminster Review, XII (Jan., 1830), 1-31.

[2] Cf. Walter Graham, English Literary Periodicals, 251-255.

The best of them--one of the best in Victorian criticism--appeared in 1870.[1] The article took thirty well-spent pages to elaborate these points: that until recently an "innate hostility" had suppressed even the attempt at an American literature; that the emergence of a class having wealth and leisure has made the attempt at writing literature a reality; that the first fruits were imitative and lacked "nationality," and some later fruits show the blemishes of excessive haste and bold experiment; that America's literary effort is as yet unsuccessful; that its success cannot be guaranteed, for there is "no uniform law of progress in poetry."

Surely this is not the kind of liberalism that had stirred American readers of the Democratic Review. Lurking behind it is again that old Victorian mainstay, the idea of class. The Westminster could muster some excitement about the American democratic masses, but even this was with a reservation: "They support literature, if they cannot create it."[2] But the commercial, thrifty, money-making character of the American middle class stunts poetic genius and leaves "little hope or scope for poetry."[3] The reviewer recognized the awkwardness of attacking democratic literature and mass culture in a review devoted to the cause of liberal democracy, and he was eager to explain himself:

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[1] XXXVIII (new series) (Oct., 1870), 263-294.

[2] Ibid., 267. [3] Ibid., p. 280.

> Ardent democrats we may be, yet it occurs to us that the creating of all men equal politically and socially did not imply also an equality in intellect and genius. All men may vote by ballot; but all men cannot write poetry.[1]

The Westminster was not of Whitman's mind; its democratic convictions did not carry it to the idea of the "divine average." "Poets," warned the Westminster, "should never write for the public.... Their gift is a pearl of too great a price to need the gaze and admiration of the vulgar to enhance it."[2]

Still, the Westminster was closer to Whitman's orientation than to James's. In Whitman there was at least some kind of hope for modern literature; he was the poet who could lead the world to a "higher goal," away from the "puny, neurotic, peddling poetasters" of the day.[3] James was apparently included in this sickly group from whom Whitman could save us: in the forty years in which he flourished as a novelist, the Westminster gave him only one paragraph--a paragraph of faint, undeveloped praise for The American.[4]

Notice that Whitman only could save the day. So far as the Westminster was concerned, he did not succeed at all. It's only significant piece on Whitman appeared in the last year of the

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[1] XXXVIII (new series) (Oct., 1870), 279-280.

[2] Ibid., 282.

[3] CLII (Nov., 1899), 555.

[4] LVII (Jan., 1880), 285.

century.[1] Fin de siecle disillusionment had become the last phase of a periodical--now a monthly--which had begun as a radical-utopian quarterly. Early in the article, the tone is appropriately wistful. "If only America were all that he sings, how worthy it would be of our imitation!"[2] Whitman's vision is seductively attractive;

> Yet these great hopes and visions carry Whitman into strange heights of optimism, where it is not easy for those on whom the realities of life press to follow him. Rightly he holds out a hand to the scum of the earth.... But it is one thing to help such creatures; it is another thing to say that their evil has no real difference from other people's good. When Augustine tells us that evil is always rising up into good...we can understand [him].... But we cannot therefore welcome evil as though it were only good in a mask.[3]

Whitman's greatest defect is, in short, "a ridiculous lack of discreet Manicheism."[4]

The whole article makes surprisingly good reading as a preface to the thought which was to come out of the T. E. Hulme circle a dozen years later. Romantic optimism was dying, at least in some places--and middle class liberal optimism was dying--in, of all places, the Westminster Review. The Adamic myth was breaking up; a dying liberal review was quoting Augustine on evil. What Hulme and Eliot felt in 1913 (the year the Westminster died) about man and western post-Renaissance thought

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[1] "Walt Whitman: The Poet of Brotherhood." CLII (Nov., 1899), 548-564.

[2] Ibid., 550. [3] Ibid., 557. [4] Ibid., 553.

may not have been startlingly original, without immediate antecedents.

There is a difference, though, between Hulme's harsh preachments of Original Sin and the Westminster's last comment on Whitman. The Westminster's reviewer could not quite succeed in loosening his grasp of Whitman's hopeful dream. He ended the article as he began it, in a mood of wistfulness. When all else is said, Whitman is still the great prophet of Brotherhood, of a society in which social divisions do not exist, of "the City of Gold."[1]

Before passing on we should notice two other liberal periodicals which took notice of Whitman: Leigh Hunt's Examiner and Chambers' Journal. Both of them were politically radical. But Whitman's social and literary radicalism was for them, as it was for the Whig Edinburgh and the radical-to-moderate Westminster, too big a step. The Examiner,[2] reviewing the first edition of Leaves of Grass (1856), imagined Whitman as a "wild Tupper of the West" who had been brought up to the business of an auctioneer but was banished to the back woods to read Emerson and Carlyle. The reading, conjectured the Examiner, drove him mad; he wrote only "when the fits came on." Whitman was only obscene and foul-mouthed; his cataloguing "a kind of lunacy." Chambers', a popular journal written for a low level of literacy, was upset by the

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[1] CLII (Nov., 1899), 562-3.

[2] No. 2512 (Mar. 22, 1856), 180-1.

quality of Whitman's democratic thought.[1] By implication Chambers' was saying over again that "en masse" was not enough, that there had to be social distinctions, perhaps even classes:

> If he did not speak "the word of the modern" quite so often, or, at least, not borrow it from the penny-a-liner, it would be better for his fame.... If a man could gain the suffrages of the human race by flattering them with the sense of their own tremendous importance, this poet would be king of the world.

But this is not merely Whitman as a person; "his very faults are national."

It is safe to conclude that the liberal periodicals, even the radical ones, were not yet ready to abandon their social and intellectual traditions to Whitman's self-assured utopia. They were eager for change; they often hoped to find the model for change in America; but, perhaps because they owed their livings to their readers, they were more timid than William Rossetti and John Addington Symonds and Edward Dowden in joining the exciting westward parade.

III.

Lord Bryce's The American Commonwealth (1888), still highly regarded as a study of American society, reflects a liberal mind somewhat hesitantly embracing the new order. With it Bryce earned his place somewhere near Tocqueville, surely above Lecky, surely equal to Arnold among the social critics of nineteenth

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[1] Chambers' Journal, XLV (July 4, 1868), 420-5.

century America.[1] Like most of the thinkers in his age, he felt the world shifting under his feet. He tried to see and describe and define the Victorian transition, and he tried as a writer, teacher, and statesman to serve as a pilot. He perceived a breakdown in the continuity of culture and saw that the saving grace of traditional religious and social impulses was vanishing. Like Lecky, although to a lesser degree, he could never shake off an uneasy fear for the future. But he remained convinced that hope for the future lay with liberal democracy. Cautiously, he gave himself to what Emerson had called the Party of Hope; the Party of Memory, to which even Emerson's friend Carlyle belonged by virtue of his mediaevalism and his hatred for individualism, seemed to Bryce to be a loose collection of worshippers of beautiful but ineffectual ruins. His break with institutions and the old order, and his affirmation of faith in a new order of freedom, was never vigorous or dramatic. He felt compelled to look steadily at America and to find a hopeful pattern for the future there.

His contemporaries rightly regarded him as the leading English authority on the United States. He certainly came the closest to reaching the stature of Tocqueville, though the American historian Nevins is probably over-enthusiastic when he writes that "Bryce and De Tocqueville stand alone, and Bryce both

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[1] Cf., for example, William Clarke, Walt Whitman (London, 1892), 38.

amplifies and corrects Tocqueville."

For in fact Bryce and Tocqueville wrote from different perspectives, perspectives which are closer to being antithetical than to being complementary. In a sense--an important sense--they illustrate the essential difference in method between French rationalism and English empiricism. Bryce respected Tocqueville's book as a rare classic; but he objected, in the name of empirical, scientific method, to Tocqueville's method of deducting, in the manner of Plato, from an a priori ideal of democracy. Such writers, said Bryce, "have preferred abstract speculations to the humbler task of ascertaining and weighing the facts."[1] Tocqueville is too often "merely fanciful."[2]

Bryce gave this difference in method special emphasis in dealing with American culture and literature. He held Tocqueville largely responsible for the notion that democracy hinders and stunts the arts and the intellect. There is, as Bryce notes, an opposite theory, which points to the superiority of Athens over Sparta and of republican Rome over despotic Rome. But Bryce could have explained, what we must explain, that Tocqueville was working with a particular definition of democracy which would make impossible such a comparison. Bryce dismissed the whole idea of the inferiority of democratic culture as outlined by Tocqueville

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[1]James Bryce, The American Commonwealth (London: Macmillan, 1888), vol. II, p. 759.

[2]Ibid., p. 758.

because

> It is really an a priori doctrine, drawn from imagining what the consequences of a complete equality of material conditions and political powers ought to be.[1]

There is another basic difference between them. Tocqueville, while making no claims to scientific partiality, achieved a fine scholarly detachment which still preserves his book. Bryce, consciously striving for scientific impartiality, unconsciously brought himself into the paradox which crippled many Victorian historians. The paradox is simply this: the very force in the nineteenth century mind which demanded that the world be viewed with scientific objectivity also carried with it, in its hip pocket, so to speak, a general teleological belief in progress. Bryce, like so many of his contemporaries, was certain that he held no dogmas; so he set out in pursuit of truth with what Nevins innocently calls "unreasoning optimism."

It is as an empirical observer and as an optimist, then, that Bryce examined American culture. He found that most of the problems raised by Tocqueville had "silently melted into the blue."[2] That knotty matter of the tyranny of the majority, "which enslaves not only the legislatures, but individual thought and speech, checking literary progress, and preventing the emergence

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[1] Bryce, II, 758.

[2] Sir James Bryce, Studies in History and Jurisprudence (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), I, p. 427.

of great men," is "not a serious evil in the America of today."[1] "Faint are the traces which remain of that intolerance of heterodoxy...whereon (Tocqueville) dilates."[2]

Notice how Bryce's empirical observations conflict with the observations of others who were looking at the America of the 1880's. Twain, too, was an "empirical observer"--though he was progressively losing some of his "unreasoning optimism." Bryce's picture leaves out the Robber Barons, the crassness of the Gilded Age, the fear and cruelty that tied together small-town mobs as Huck Finn saw them. Even Whitman, looking at the reality instead of the dream for a moment while writing Democratic Vistas, worked his way inductively into a world surprisingly like the one prophesied in Democracy in America. Bryce did not see either what his radical countryman Robert Buchanan (almost alone among nineteenth century mortals) saw: the huge genius of Melville ignored and reduced to forty years of tragic silence.[3] To notice this disparity of vision may be a digression, but it has a point: empirical observation of an entire culture is a difficult thing, complicated by prejudgments of what one hopes to find (in Bryce's case) and by the shock of temporary or permanent disillusionment (in the cases of Twain, Whitman, and Buchanan).

Bryce was by no means blind to the inadequacies of American

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[1]Bryce, Studies, I, 422. [2]Ibid., I, 423.

[3]See below, p. 267.

culture. "American democracy has certainly produced no age of Pericles."[1] Her literature he found to be mediocre, showing no "distinctive quality."[2] (Like most critics of American imitativeness, he passed over Whitman without comment.) But Bryce thought that the deficiencies of American culture, especially since Tocqueville's deductive method of analysis, had been exaggerated.

> Neither has [American democracy] dwarfed literature and led a wretched people, so dull as not even to realize their dullness, into a barren plain of featureless mediocrity.[3]

American culture was deficient; but the source of the deficiency was not democratic thought or the democratic social order.

> To ascribe the deficiencies, such as they are, of art and culture in America, solely or even mainly to her form of government, is not less absurd than to ascribe, as many Americans of what I may call the trumpeting school do, her marvellous material progress to the same cause. It is not Democracy that has paid off a gigantic debt and raised Chicago out of a swamp. Neither is it Democracy that has denied her philosophers like Burke and poets like Wordsworth.[4]

He traced the want of culture instead to perfectly natural causes[5] --most of which had already been examined by Tocqueville. The shortcomings[6] that are present in American literature, Bryce

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[1] American Commonwealth, II, 759.

[2] Ibid., II, 764. [3] Ibid., II, 759. [4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., II, 767-777. Cf. Nevins, op. cit., pp. 436-437.

[6] Bryce's list of shortcomings is also very like Tocqueville's list of predicted shortcomings. Cf. pp. 55-59 above. Bryce found a general lack of taste, a liking for bold effects, a demand

insisted, had little or no relationship to the democratic form of American society, and little relationship to the general problem of cultural orientation.

He stated fairly the case that other analysts have against democratic culture and its effects upon literature; he was even willing to put the case that writers would have to eschew refinement for the sake of communication:

> Now the judgment of the masses is a poor standard for the thinker or artist to set before him. It may narrow his view and debase his style. He fears to tread in new pathe or express unpopular opinions; or if he despises the multitude he may take refuge in an acrid cynicism.[1]

But Bryce stated this only in order to refute it. His refutation, manifesting far more of liberal optimism than of empirical observation, implied (what he stated directly elsewhere)[2] that the wisdom of the mass is always greater than the wisdom of the select few:

> But it is quite possible to have a democratic people which shall be neither fond of letters nor disposed to trust its own judgment and taste in judging them .... No man need lean on a faction or propitiate a coterie. A pure clear voice with an unwonted message may at first fail to make itself heard over the din of competitors for popular favour; but once heard, it

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for quick effects, a tendency towards intellectual novelty for its own sake, and a tendency to equate bigness and greatness. Cf. Ibid.

[1] American Commonwealth, II, 762-3.

[2] Nevins, op. cit., p. 434.

> and its message will probably be judged on their own merits.[1]

The rejection of a coterie and the confidence that "a pure clear voice" will make itself heard in a democratic society--is it not finally the essence of Whitman's dream about a new literature?

Unlike Whitman, Bryce still thought in terms of classes. Social equality would not tear down the class structure; it would only soften and humanize it. With an unconscious lack of parallelism which is almost definitive of liberalism, Bryce put it this way: "I do not think that the upper class loses in grace; I am sure that the humble class gains in independence."[2] But the independence of the humble does not threaten culture.

In fact, he thought the prospects for rapid improvement in American culture and literature were good. The energy being spent on material conquest would soon be diverted to the arts.[3] Greater wealth would also aid the cause; many of the phenomena which Tocqueville had ascribed to democracy "were due only to the fact that large fortunes had not yet grown up in America...."[4] A variety of social factors would combine to improve things; but social equality neither stunted the artist's growth nor drove him into isolation.

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[1] American Commonwealth, II, 763.

[2] Quoted by Nevins, op. cit., p. 435.

[3] American Commonwealth, II, 767-777.

[4] Studies in History and Jurisprudence, I, 391.

In short, Bryce predicted a socially viable democratic movement in literature and ruled out the necessity and even the approach of a cultured school--just at the time that these two were beginning to grapple. His total feeling for a new, free world oriented westward was one of measured confidence.

IV.

Robert Buchanan, Swinburne's fiery enemy, was a life-long devotee of Whitman and his work. His admiration, indeed, often led him astray and deprived him of a badly needed sense of discrimination.[1] He was the radical son of a radical Owenite pamphleteer,[2] "loyal throughout life to the anti-religious tradition in which he was bred."[3] He was a busy journalist, and the author of a curious collection of verse significantly entitled Buchanan's Poems for the People.

Buchanan's account of his first introduction to Whitman's poetry typifies the rebel spirit that always moved within him:

> When the critics tell me that the style of a book is bad, I am always tempted to buy that book. For this reason in my young days I bought Walt Whitman.[4]

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[1] Cf. Blodgett, Walt Whitman in England, p. 76.

[2] Dictionary of National Biography, III, 195.

[3] Ibid., Second Supplement, I, 247.

[4] Harriet Jay, The Life of Robert Buchanan (London, 1903), 271.

He liked the style; he liked everything about Whitman. By 1868 he had published his first essay on him. For thirty years more he defended and championed him. He compared him to Socrates and to Christ, and in a lengthy poem[1] written after his return from America in 1885 he castigated the Americans for honoring James and Howells instead of Whitman.

> ...whose spirit, like a flag unfurled,
> Proclaims the freedom of the world.

It is not surprising that Buchanan should have shared completely Whitman's viewpoint on the needs of modern literature. "It is at last clear," he tells us in an essay called "On My Tentatives," "that the poetry of humanity is newly dawning."[2] Elsewhere he speaks of Whitman sowing

> the first seeds of an indigenous literature, by putting in music the spiritual and fleshly yearnings of the cosmical man, and, more particularly, indicating the great elements which distinguish American freedom from the fabrics created by European politicians.[3]

But Whitman's vision is not restricted to America. He is in the vanguard of a great sweeping movement; he "sees everywhere but one wondrous life--the movement of the great masses, seeking incessantly under the sun for guarantees of personal liberty."[4] Buchanan was eager to transplant what Whitman had sown.

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[1] "Socrates in Camden, With a Look Round," Academy, XXVIII (Aug. 15, 1885), 103.

[2] David Gray and Other Essays (London, 1868), p. 297.

[3] Ibid., p. 207. [4] Ibid.

For Buchanan, as for Whitman, this new-breaking poetry of humanity was to confine itself to the actual physical objects of the here-and-now. The new literature, like Whitman's America, will have none of

> that worst absenteeism wherein the soul deserts its proper and ample physical sphere, and sallies out into the regions of the impossible and unknown.[1]

Like Whitman, he insisted that "actual life, independent of accessories, is the true material for poetic art...."[2] He advocated a manly, rugged, athletic literature. He assailed bitterly the literati in America with their "mania for false refinement";[3] James and Howells were the leaders of a group of "divers deft man-milliners and drapers, busy in the manufacture of European underclothing."[4] Complaining about Whitman's neglect, he again flailed James as the antithesis of the new literature:

> Tell James to burn his continental
> Library of the Detrimental,
> And climb a hill, or take a header
> Into the briny billowy seas,
> Or find some strapping Muse and wed her,
> Instead of simpering at teas!
> How should the Titaness of nations,
> Whose flag o'er half a world unfurls,
> Sit listening to the sibillations
> Of shopmen twittering to girls?[5]

The new literature would be a mass literature, dealing with

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[1] David Gray and Other Essays, p. 209.

[2] Ibid., 290. [3] Ibid., 293.

[4] Quoted in Jay, Robert Buchanan, 298.

[5] "Socrates in Camden," 103.

the common and the ordinary, making its appeal to and submitting to the judgment of the masses. For him this created no problem. He took rakish pride in the fact that his own "greatest opponents have been found among men of what is called 'literary culture.'" With jaunty modesty he suggested that

> the success of my writings with simple people may be no sign of their possessing durable poetic worth, but it at least implies that I have been labouring in the right direction.[1]

He did not pause long enough to reflect on the fact that it was in such a mass society that Whitman was usually either vilified or ignored and "No one seemed to know anything" of Melville, who

> Sits all forgotten or ignored
> While haberdashers are adored![2]

Buchanan was not totally blind to particular faults in Whitman. It is strange--and unfortunate--that he did not try to account for the fact that his beloved master was "not an artist at all, not a poet, properly so called";[3] that he was a "prophet with no taste" who lacked sweetness and music and who employed "crude metaphors and false notes" and "needless bestialities" while demonstrating "a general want of balance."[4] His confidence in Whitman's genre, however, never wavered:

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[1] "Socrates in Camden," p. 291.

[2] Ibid., p. 103.

[3] David Gray, p. 215.

[4] Ibid., p. 218.

> ...[W]hen this has been said, all blame has been said .... Walt Whitman has arisen on [sic] the States to point the way to new literatures. He is the plain pioneer, pickaxe on shoulder, working and "roughing." The daintier gentlemen will follow, and build where he is delving.[1]

Henry James was one of those "daintier gentlemen"--one who earned Buchanan's particular scorn because he had been born with all the potentials that only an American writer had, but had sacrificed his advantage in a vain and foolish desire to become "the superfine young man." In a bombastic article called "The Modern Young Man as Critic" (1889),[2] Buchanan went after James as a writer who lacked manly vigor, flesh and blood, and intellectual and moral health. Buchanan was appalled by James's "pessimism" and by his cynical anti-sentimentalism--products of a man who "has never dreamed a dream or been a child."[3] It is culture that has ruined James, Howells, and such writers:

> The air of free literature asphyxiates and paralyses them. Outside of society and Paris, they are far too clever, far too educated, to breathe or live at all.[4]

To Buchanan's mind James had exiled himself clean out of modern literature. He would have no place in it.

> I can quite imagine that Mr. Henry James, had he read less, travelled less, known less, might have become a highly interesting writer; but early in his career he appears to have quitted America for Europe, and to have left the possibilities of his grand nativity

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[1] David Gray, p. 219.

[2] Universal Review, III (March, 1889), 353-361.

[3] Ibid., 355. [4] Ibid., 358.

> behind him. To be born an American is surely a great privilege; yet nearly all Americans of talent flit moth-like towards the garish lights of London or Paris, and hover round these lights in wanton, not to say imbecile, gyrations, till they pop into the glare, drop down singed and wingless, and are forgotten.[1]

The extent of Buchanan's American orientation is almost amusingly apparent. His description of Henry James is almost exactly Whitman's description of Matthew Arnold, or the common American's stereotyped description of the English man of culture:

> Highly finished, perfectly machined, icily regular, thoroughly representative, Mr. James is the educated young or youngish American whom we have all met in society; the well-dressed person who knows everybody, who has read everything, who has been everywhere....[2]

But even the eager optimism, the exuberant radicalism, and the impatient, slashing ridicule of Buchanan fizzled out at the end of the century. His last piece of writing was significantly entitled "The End of the Century." It is a wistful regret, a slowly gathering awareness that something in the century went wrong. Buchanan sounds very much like a slightly confused old man who has just awakened from a splendid dream and would like to go to sleep again. The actual weighs heavily on him:

> Democracy and Humanitarianism are almost as discredited as Christianity, the Dream of perfection is over .... Among all the great Prophets of the dying Century, only one remains to us--Herbert Spencer....[3]

Buchanan's last mood is very like that of the Westminster's final

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[1] Universal Review, III, Ibid. [2] Ibid., p. 355.

[3] Harriet Jay, op. cit., p. 305.

review of Whitman: he cannot quite bring himself to believe that the dream is over. He too ends on a misty, almost other-worldly note of faint but unkilled hope:

> ...when the hope of Democracy is realized, the prophecy of philosophy will be fulfilled, and finally we shall discover that the World is Fairyland after all.[1]

V.

Scotland, with its memories of the Highland clearances, its intimacy with French thought through the "Auld Alliance," its long tradition of popular romanticism culminating in Burns, and its strong nationalist and Presbyterian antipathy to the English Establishment, was fertile soil for the liberal movement. The Scots were naturally disposed to take a keen interest in what was taking shape in America. While sprawling America virtually ignored Walt Whitman, tiny Scotland produced a number of articles and three books on him in his own lifetime.

One of them is worth only passing notice. Written by one James Wilkie and published by the Fifeshire Journal in 1886, it bore the title The Democratic Movement in Literature: Walt Whitman. Wilkie, too, found in Whitman a hint of what modern literature was to be: expansive, realistic, unrestrained, like "the free wild air of the prairies."[2] An enthusiastic democrat, he saw the

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[1]Harriet Jay, op. cit., p. 298.

[2]The Democratic Movement in Literature: Walt Whitman (Cupar, Fife, 1886), pp. 39-40.

past as a mere encumbrance. Europe's place was in the past, America's in the future. He attacked the American "traditionalists" as forcefully as he praised Whitman. Longfellow and Bryant were out of stride with the times; they were traitors to the spirit of their country and their age.

> There is nothing democratic in Longfellow. He is the fitting companion to a romantic English maiden in the deep window seat of some old hall, where the lazy afternoon sunshine lies languidly upon the age-stained fountains....[1]

The old hall and the age-stained fountains were, of course, just the things that Irving, Cooper, Hawthorne, Longfellow, and Henry James were reaching out for while Whitman "roared in the pines."

William Clarke, another energetic radical, who was the English editor of Mazzini's essays, also studied Whitman at book-length. The book is a thorough and careful defense of Whitman; although it is overshadowed by John Addington Symonds' book, it is still of considerable interest as a nineteenth century British apology for Whitman.

Again in Clarke's case, it is the awareness of transition, of the passing of the world as men knew it, that compels an interest in Whitman. "Our acceptance of Whitman," he wrote,[2]

> mainly depends on whether we accept the advent, welcome or unwelcome, of a new world; on whether we really believe that the old forms are exhausted; on whether we can say with him--

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[1] The Democratic Movement in Literature, p. 23.

[2] William Clarke, Walt Whitman (London, 1893), p. 76.

'Away with old romance! ...
Away with love-verses sugared in rhyme, the intrigues,
amours of idlers.'

and can also

'Raise a voice for superb themes...
to Exalt the present and the real,
To teach the average man the glory of his daily
walk and trade.'

Clarke generally welcomed the advent of such a world and such a literature. Whitman's poetry was "the first rough draft of a great American literature."[1] It would soon enough spread to Europe. He honored Whitman for parting company with "mere eloquent versifiers, far-off echoes of [Europe], or conventional authors who accepted without questioning all the respectable dogmas in morals, religion, and society."[2] Whitman's greatness, he contended, rises directly out of his isolation from Europe.

> [H]ad he been brought up on European culture, he could only at best have added to the kind of work which Longfellow and Irving did so well. In that case he could not have been the voice of this great, rough, virile America, with its 'powerful uneducated persons,' of whom the cultivated Bostonian authors knew no more than they did of the working classes of Europe.[3]

In defending Whitman, Clarke had no intention of overlooking the defects in his poetry. He quite possibly had Edward Carpenter in mind, and perhaps even Buchanan, when he wrote that "those are very doubtful guardians of Whitman's reputation who do not admit

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[1]Clarke, Walt Whitman, p. 52.

[2]Ibid., p. 81. [3]Ibid., p. 52.

Whitman's serious defects."[1] He found "lack of harmony and discernment," "much that is wooden, flat, prolix in Whitman's writings...." But the duty of the critic, he felt, was to "find compensation" for these defects.

> And we may tolerate much from the uncultured bard of the 'divine infant' which we could not put up with from the poet of a rich, full-orbed era or from 'the idle singer of an empty day.'[2]

So far the defense is merely relative. It might be interpreted as saying, "How could you expect to find anything better from an American?" But Clarke's defense is more positive than that. Perhaps, he suggests, the standards of critical judgment must be altered; perhaps they are not applicable to the democratic literature of the newly-awakening world.

> It might even be contended that his formlessness holds the germs of new forms; that the old rhymes will rather be used in the future for mere <u>vers de societe</u> than for great poetry.

We may find the old forms inadequate to contain the liberated spirit.

> It may also be argued that the vast, sweeping conceptions of our age, the suggestions of an infinite surging movement...can never be confined in the narrower and more precise forms of the poetic art, and that Whitman's work affords, in some degree, a hint of things to come.[3]

Clarke did feel some hesitation, some failing of his faith in the new order that was taking shape. He saw a real problem in

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[1] Clarke, <u>Walt Whitman</u>, p. 53.

[2] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 52. [3] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 74.

America's lack of tradition and in her materialism. His glimpse of the world's future is an interestingly accurate picture of the world today, painfully torn between East and West:

> Russia and America--diverse enough in many ways, but alike in their vast territorial expansion and assimilative capacity--seem destined to be the great political organisms, the world powers of the future. This is Nature's decree, which cannot be set aside by any judgment from another court.... Spiritually and artistically supreme, Europe will politically and commercially recede before the resounding tread of Western and Eastern giants. But is this titanic organism to be informed with no soul?[1]

"That," said Clarke, "is the American problem." But dying Europe cannot solve it for her (as Arnold and James, for example, were maintaining). She had to go it alone, looking to the future and cutting herself off from Europe and the past. But would the American Titan find a soul? Clarke thought so. This is the great problem "which Whitman has set himself to solve; he wants to help America to find her soul."[2] The book makes one thing clear: Clarke was confident that Whitman was succeeding.

John Mackinnon Robertson, who had for a few years assisted with the editing of the Westminster Review, refused to accept the idea that the poetic forms of the past were outworn and of no use to the literature of the modern world.[3] Even so, his book is a laudatory defense of Whitman's "movement of expansion." "Perhaps,"

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[1]Clarke, Walt Whitman, p. 46. [2]Ibid.

[3]John M. Robertson, Walt Whitman: Poet and Democrat (Edinburgh, 1884), p. 49.

wrote Robertson, "a more important question than the form of the poetry of the future is that as to the poets' themes...."[1] And while much of the poetry of the age will "go the way of last generation's theology," Whitman will endure. The reason is

> not merely that his message is the intense expression of his deepest passion, but that the passion is the very flower of the life of the race thus far, and carries in it the seeds of things to come. He cannot soon be left behind--he has gone so far before.[2]

In Robertson's book too, Whitman is justified by what amounts to a change in belief. Whitman's poetry reflects for Robertson a gigantic stride of the human soul into virgin realms of thought and existence. The rest of the world must simply adjust and follow. The struggle is one of optimism <u>versus</u> pessimism; we must cast our lot with optimism. It had to be an act of faith, of affirmation. Much of the structure of traditional belief had to be shed along the way--in the name of the great goddess of the nineteenth century, Progress. The idea of sin, for example, must be left behind; its denial is a necessary part of the ritual on the road to freedom and perfection.[3]

Robertson's faith in the New Paradise which was struggling to be born was strong enough so that he would allow Whitman his inconsistencies. The end would justify Whitman's means. He noticed, for example, Whitman's inconsistency in being intolerant,

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[1] Robertson, <u>Walt Whitman</u>, pp. 49-50.

[2] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 52. [3] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 25.

in the name of democracy, of the _litterateurs_, but added that "the prophet of democracy, being what he is, must needs be didactically inconsistent in order to be consistently prophetic."[1]

We might speculate about the strength of Robertson's "faith." For him it was not merely the assent to an idealistic dream. In fact, he did not see the "Dream" tradition in Whitman at all. For him Whitman was not a visionary; the world he represented was, in America at least, here and now. Robertson regarded him as "the most expert scholar of democracy" just as he is "the most actual democrat." Perhaps this literal reading of Whitman made Robertson's faith possible; for he believed that it was as a careful scholar that Whitman had won his "matchless certitude of belief." The dream from which Robert Buchanan awoke at the end of the century was for Robertson no mere dream at all.[2]

VI.

There exist a number of comments on Whitman from minor representatives of radical liberalism, and scattered fragments from major representatives, which deserve a few pages of attention.

Edward Carpenter was a minor literary figure with a great deal to say about Whitman. In his _Days with Walt Whitman_ he acknowledged his discipleship; his earlier lengthy poetic work, _Towards Democracy_, is almost entirely imitative, and won him the

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[1] Robertson, _Walt Whitman_, p. 11. [2] _Ibid._, p. 8.

title of "the Walt Whitman of England." Indeed, Tolstoy[1] had rated him above Whitman, and John Addington Symonds,[2] more moderately, called his Towards Democracy "not only the best interpretation of Whitman's spirit, but also the best imitation of his manner." Whitman himself was delighted to have an imitator, and predicted--erroneously--a great reputation for him.

> I think he has given his book a Whitmanesque odor. He is ardently my friend--ardently. He will yet cut a figure in his own country. He is now just about climbing the hill: when he gets up to the top people will see and acknowledge him.[3]

For Carpenter, too, Whitman was the prophet of a new era.[4] In him the dream was being realized.

> ...The hour has struck for mankind of liberation, of emancipation, from the mere outer rules and limitations...it is an hour which must needs come; and it opens for humanity on an era of unexampled glory.[5]

The democratic dream-world that Carpenter was looking towards was a world of free, natural, communal anarchy; it was the epitome of human evolution; man had already evolved progressively from simple consciousness of self-consciousness; he was now at the brink of "the mass-consciousness of cosmic consciousness of the coming man."

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[1]Quoted by William Diack, "Edward Carpenter: The Walt Whitman of England," Westminster Review, CLVI (Dec., 1901), 655.

[2]Walt Whitman: A Study (London, 1893), p. 149.

[3]Trauble, I, 104.

[4]Days with Walt Whitman (London, 1906), p. 84.

[5]Ibid., pp. 88-9.

This "evolution into a further order of consciousness" is for Carpenter "the key to the future."[1] He devised an interesting program of reform which was to help mankind along into its final Paradisial state; it called for

> ...the gradual evolution of a non-governmental form of Society, the communalization of land and capital...the extension of the monogamic marriage into some kind of group-alliance, the restoration and full recognition of heroic friendships of Greek and primitive times... friendship with the Animals, open-air habits, fruitarian food, and such degree of Nudity as we can reasonably attain to.[2]

When it came to literature, Carpenter shared with many of his contemporaries the rejuvenated "bardic" idea of the writer. We can well imagine what he would have to say about Arnold and James and their theories about detachment. The task of the poet was to prepare the way and guide the common people into the Promised Land. "Literary people" he regarded as a dying race, incapable of contributing to "the great world." Whitman, said Carpenter, was in the van of

> a new era of literature--a literature appealing to all who deal with life directly, and know what it is, a literature which will be read and lovingly absorbed by the millions as time goes on.[3]

Whitman's poetry was prophetically right for the age. For the new literature had to be uncultured (one of Carpenter's books is

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[1] My Days and Dreams (London, 1916), p. 206.

[2] Ibid., p. 208.

[3] Days with Walt Whitman, p. 105.

entitled Civilization: Its Cause and Cure). And as for form: "the form vanishes in the meaning."[1]

Roden Noel, a minor poet under the spell of Shelley who turned his restless energies to socialist slum work, to philosophical reviews in the Academy, and to editing the works of his close friend Robert Buchanan in addition to serving a brief office as groom of the Privy Chamber,[2] also brushed aside Whitman's clumsiness and harshness and justified him in terms of his meaning. Whitman's "ignorance of phrase mongering," said Noel, put him in the company of the old bards. His defects were more than redeemed by his oneness with virgin soil, his acceptance of all, his pride in and use of his own nation, his optimism, his desire to reveal himself rather than to create forms, his oneness with the meanest of people. But Noel stopped short--far short of Carpenter and a good deal short of Buchanan. Whitman's notion of equality disturbed him. Distinctions between men do exist, Noel argued, and "the aggregate soul" could not have gotten on without the great men, the Heroes. It is to Carlyle that Noel turns in order to correct Whitman. There must be heroes--and reverence for them. All of Noel's radicalism could not stand up to his fear of "the tyranny of a blind and prejudiced and ignorant majority."[3]

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[1] Days with Walt Whitman, p. 108.

[2] DNB, XIV, 437.

[3] Roden Noel, "A Study of Walt Whitman, the Poet of Modern Democracy," Dark Blue, II (Oct. and Nov., 1871), 241-253; 336-349.

Sir Leslie Stephen, an avid anti-middle class liberal who had traveled to the States three times, loved Yankees, and was once almost refused admission to Woolwich Arsenal because he looked like an American,[1] was less radical than Carpenter and Noel and more hesitant to accept Whitman as the prophet of the age. Like many another learned Victorian critic, Stephen saw an alarming parallel between Whitman and Martin Tupper. "Walt Whitman always seemed to me," he wrote, "Emerson diluted with Tupper--twaddle with gleams of something better."[2] The more dedicated radicals seldom had such reservations.

Another of them was Ernest Rhys. He was in the thick of the struggle for a new society and a culture for the masses. "I am sure," he wrote Whitman, "you would be tremendously glad to help us here, in the very camp of the enemy, the stronghold of caste and aristocracy."[3] In the introduction in his 1886 edition of The Poems of Walt Whitman, done for the Canterbury Poets Series,[4] Rhys added his voice to the proclamation that was decreeing that "the poetry of archaic form and sentiment" must go.

> We want now a poetry that shall be masterfully contemporary, of irresistible appeal to the hearts of the people; and this we certainly have not in England today.... What...is Tennyson's distinctive achievement in poetry? We have to answer, The Idylls of the King: and Browning's? The Ring and the Book.

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[1]Frederic W. Maitland, The Life and Letters of Sir Leslie Stephen (London, 1906), pp. 107-128.

[2]Ibid., p. 464.

[3]Quoted by Blodgett, op. cit., pp. 192-3.

[4]London, 1886, p. xxviii.

> It does not need a prophet to see at once that there is no hope of poems like these...ever really reaching the people at all.

"Convention," he wrote, "is the curse of poetry, as it is the curse of everything else."[1] Still, something compelled him to want to justify Whitman's break with convention. He did it, with no apparent discomfort, by appealing to a convention of rebellion:

> .../A/lthough Walt Whitman is an innovator, he follows as naturally in the literary order as did Marlowe, for instance, and after him Shakespeare, in their day; and is as naturally related to his time.[2]

The affinity between Whitman and the English social radicals was a natural one. We could add the name of Havelock Ellis, whose The New Spirit[3] hailed Whitman as a prophet, and also some of the radical poets and critics to be considered in the next chapter, among them Wilde, James Thomson, William Rossetti, and Edward Dowden.

VII.

As might be expected, the radicals dealt with Henry James more with damning silence than with anything else. It was only the more gifted and more versatile of them who deigned to consider him at all. But because such criticism is on a higher, more aesthetic plane, the reactions of Shaw and William Archer, for example, will be dealt with in the final chapter. Although it may imply a cut at his reputation as a man of letters, it is

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[1] London, 1886, p. xxvi. [2] Ibid., p. xxxviii.

[3] London, 1890.

H. G. Wells who must represent the more doctrinaire radical view of James.

Wells had carried on a rather lengthy correspondence with James on the nature of the novel, beginning in 1898. Two more opposite theories can scarcely be imagined. For James, of course, the novel had to be a work of art; by objective selection and ordering it had to re-present in all its delicate vicissitudes the reality of human life. Here is a typical part of Wells's rejoinder:

> Personally I have no use at all for life as it is, except as raw material. It bores me to look at things unless there is also the idea of doing something with them.... The contemplative ecstacy of the saints would be hell to me. In the--I forget how many--books I have written, it is always about life being altered that I write, or about people developing schemes for altering life. And I have never once "presented" life. My apparently most objective books are criticisms and incitements to change.[1]

For Wells fiction worked through science and sociology; it was close to journalism, describing social problems and suggesting remedies. We have only to recall that Kipps and The Golden Bowl were published in the same year to sense the gulf between Wells and James.

Even so, James was startled and hurt when Wells attacked him in Boon. Actually, Wells's attack was only a witty re-statement

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[1]Quoted by Frank Swinnerton, Introduction, Nocturne (New York, 1917), p. x.

of the periodical attacks that James had been bearing since 1879.

James would surely have agreed with Wells that "a literary congress in America must be a festival in honour of sterility."[1] But they meant different things by sterility. Wells felt that America was continually overlooking her own vigorous, westward-oriented writers because she was looking for something of the European air, "doubly starred in Baedeker." America's resources seemed to Wells more than adequate to produce writers: but he added that the writers were quickly strangled by the demands for unnatural literary conformity.[2]

Wells could only regard James as "a magnificent but painful hippopotamus resolved...upon picking up a pea."[3] Literature should be judged by what it accomplished in the world; it had to be a highly practical thing. He had the characters in Boon come round to discussing the question "Ought there, in fact, to be a Henry James?" Boon's answer is obviously Wells's:

> I don't think so.... There's contributory art, of course, and a way of doing things better or worse .... But the way of doing isn't the end. First the end must be judged--and then if you like talk of how it is done.

James, according to Wells, either left out getting there or got to too trivial a thing[4]--a characteristic which Sir Max Beerbohm

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[1] Boon, The Mind of the Race, The Wild Asses of the Devil, and The Last Trump (London, 1915), p. 147.

[2] Boon, p. 144. [3] Ibid., p. 108. [4] Ibid., p. 101.

also noted, and duly parodied in a sketch in his A Christmas Garland called "The Mote in the Middle Distance."[1]

Wells's robust love of the ordinary set him against James's highly select characters, characters who, he pointed out, "never make lusty love, never go to angry war, never shout at an election or perspire at poker...."[2] The selection was really omission; James "picks the straws out of the hair of Life before he paints her. But without the straws she is no longer the mad woman we love."[3] The selection seemed to Wells based upon a superficial and unnecessary dictum, borrowed from the studio, that "a work of art must be judged by its oneness." James "never discovered... that life isn't a studio."[4]

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[1]Reprinted in F. W. Dupee, The Question of Henry James, pp. 58-62.

[2]Boon, p. 106. [3]Ibid., p. 104. [4]Ibid., pp. 102-103.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TRUTH AND BEAUTY: SCHOLARS AND BELLETRISTS

Occasionally separable from the big, noisy body of didactic Victorian criticism is a thin line of criticism which attempts to judge literature on aesthetic grounds. In many ways the attempt is only a reaction--a reaction against the utilitarianism and the strident moralism and the political bellicosity of the Victorian "main stream." In similar refuge from the main stream is another thin line, a line of criticism which attempts to bolster and solidify literary judgment by utilizing the accumulated learning and the techniques (and at times the pretentious professorial respectability) of scholarship. In the former line we must include the Pre-Raphaelites and the Parnassians and, obviously, the men associated with the aesthetic movement of the 'nineties; but we must also include certain poets and novelists who, though they had political opinions as strong as anyone's, judged the literature of the age by artistic standards more than by any other. In the line of scholars we must place those men--primarily university men--who tried to judge the form and content of literature from outside the Victorian arena, who tried (not always successfully) to ward off political and philosophical labels with the charm of academic life, but who still attempted to address the people within the arena by way of the printed word.

We can only distinguish these lines at the expense of strict justice. Many of the men we are now to deal with can be placed in one or another of the camps that have been marked off in the previous three chapters. Even more obviously, Matthew Arnold, a cultural conservative, was a disinterested scholar who employed aesthetic standards; the reviews we have examined did more than grind their political axes; Ford Maddox Ford at one extreme, and Ernest Rhys at the other, probably do not abstract art to its political orientation a great deal more than do, say, Edward Dowden and Robert Louis Stevenson. But what can be done? The age does not yield very willingly to the categories that its students try to impose upon it. The trap of arbitrary distinction can be only narrowly avoided; we can set apart for separate study some men who, by virtue of academic association or creative achievement or aesthetic proclivity, transcend political labels and signify something beyond them.

I.

The first real flurry of interest in Whitman in England occurred among the Pre-Raphaelites. It was characteristic of the brotherhood, particularly of W. M. Rossetti, to be on the lookout for the experimental in literature. Like most Victorians, they were disappointed; American writing was imitative; they were outspokenly hostile, for example, to Longfellow.[1] Still, with

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[1]Louise H. Johnson, America in the Thought of Leading British Men of Letters, 1830-1890 (Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1943), p. 496.

their heightened sense of the craftsmanship of poetry and painting, what could they make of Whitman?

The total response of the P. R. B. to Whitman was mixed. The first of them to discover Leaves of Grass was the minor poet and sculptor, William Bell Scott. He happened upon a copy of the first edition in 1855 and read it with mixed feelings. He felt attracted to the book and fascinated by it, but he also remarked in a letter to W. M. Rossetti, "I hope the author will shut up and write no more."[1] But fortunately for Whitman, Scott thought enough of his strange prize to send it to Rossetti as a Christmas gift the same year.

W. M. Rossetti's reaction to Whitman is well known. He became, almost immediately, the most active of the Whitman enthusiasts in England.[2] His conviction that Whitman was "one of the great sons of the earth, a few steps below Shakespeare on the throne of immortality"[3] never wavered--as did the conviction of another Pre-Raphaelite, Swinburne. It was Rossetti who put together and arranged for the publication of the first English edition of Whitman--a service Whitman never forgot, for Rossetti's name lent obvious prestige to the venture. In the introduction

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[1] Ruskin, Rossetti, and Pre-Raphaelitism Papers, ed. W. M. Rossetti (London, 1899), p. 147.

[2] Gohdes and Baum, Letters of W. M. Rossetti Concerning Whitman..., p. viii.

[3] Ibid., p. 63.

to his edition, and in numerous essays and letters, Rossetti warmly praised and eagerly defended Whitman.

But W. M. Rossetti was not the exact image of the pure Pre-Raphaelite. For him even more than for Swinburne the attraction was not one of form, but of spirit and idea. Unlike other members of the P. R. B., he had little to say about Whitman's art. He was swept along by Whitman's liberal and liberating spirit, and found in it the voice of his own political passions. An ardent democrat who celebrated the death of the "abhorred of Europe, moveless Metternich" in a fierce sonnet which hears "Europe's tocsin" ringing "terrific birth,"[1] he found in Whitman "the sublime of Democracy."[2] He was confident that this "fresh, athletic, and American poetry" was "predestined to be traced up to by generation after generation of believing and ardent... disciples."[3] His own ardor was not modified by reservations.

His more famous poet-painter brother, D. G. Rossetti, had definite reservations about Whitman. While William Michael was busying himself with arrangements for his edition of Whitman and Swinburne was adding his blazing name to Whitman's cause, D. G. Rossetti released his own feelings to Allingham:

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[1]W. M. Rossetti, Democratic Sonnets (London, 1907), II, xxi.

[2]Letters...Concerning Whitman..., p. 40.

[3]W. M. Rossetti, "Prefatory Notice," Poems by Walt Whitman (London, 1910), p. 22.

> How I loathe Wishi-Washi [Rossetti's name for Longfellow's "Hiawatha"] --of course without reading it. I have not been so happy in loathing anything for a long time--except, I think, Leaves of Grass.[1]

Like his brother, D. G. Rossetti was deeply respectful of Whitman the man. But this could not alter his artistic judgment.

> The Leaves are suggestive, like the advertisement columns of a newspaper...but poetry without form is--what shall I say? Proportion seems to me the most inalienable quality of a poem.[2]

Swinburne's gradual metamorphosis from reverent friend to jeering critic we have already noticed, and along with it his metamorphosis from protesting democrat to haughty aristocrat. He and W. M. Rossetti alone of the Pre-Raphaelites seem to have been swayed by the broader social implications of Whitman's orientation. Allingham objected to the "lawlessness and incoherence" of Whitman's verse. To call it poetry, he wrote, "would be a mere abuse of language."[3] H. Buxton Forman, on the other hand, was closer to W. M. Rossetti. He defended Whitman's "primeval outspokenness" and want of form as "part and parcel of the religion he has felt impelled to preach."[4] William Morris took little interest in the furor over Whitman, though he did send him a note

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[1] Letters of D. G. Rossetti to William Allingham, 1854-1870, ed. G. B. Hill (London, 1897), p. 181.

[2] Quoted by A. C. Benson, Life of D. G. Rossetti (London, 1904), p. 173.

[3] Letters...Rossetti to Allingham, p. 182.

[4] H. B. Forman, "Walt Whitman," in Lloyd C. Sanders, ed., Celebrities of the Century (London, 1887), p. 1047.

of respect on his seventieth birthday.[1]

Because Ruskin's theories about art gave impetus to the P. R. B., which was formed with his detached blessing, we should also consider him at this point. There is no mention of Whitman in Ruskin's papers until 1880. This single comment is a letter; Ruskin's attention is on the spirit and thought of the man.

> I have no time to write such a letter as I should like to Mr. Whitman. Will you kindly transmit the value of enclosed cheque to him--with request for five copies? The reason neither he nor Emerson is read in England is, first, that they are deadly true--in the sense of rifles --against all our deadliest sins, and second, that this truth is asserted with a special colour of American egotism, which good English scholars can not--and bad ones will not--endure.[2]

Moving away from the Pre-Raphaelites en route to the aesthetes, we should consider for a moment Sir Edmund Gosse, who was for a time associated with the P. R. B. and was in later life a close friend of Henry James. From his scant attention to James's relationship to America, his too simple notion that James's alienation was greatly increased by the cold reception which America gave The Bostonians,[3] and his rather strange announcement in 1890 that "the realistic novel has had its day,"[4] we can

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[1]Blodgett, p. 137.

[2]William S. Kennedy, Reminiscences of Walt Whitman (Philadelphia, 1896), p. 84.

[3]Sir Edmund Gosse, Aspects and Impressions (London, 1922), pp. 27-8.

[4]Quoted by Grant C. Knight, The Critical Period in American Literature (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1951), p. 26.

only conclude that Gosse lacked awareness of American temper and American needs. Still, his comments on Whitman are interesting.

In his comments we can detect a gradual cooling. Increasingly he distrusted the effects of Whitman's free, westward orientation. In his case, too, the excitement of the American Dream seems to have worn off by the turn of the century. In an 1876 review in the Academy, he argued Whitman's achievement of "the truly beautiful." But at the same time he was slightly disturbed; he pointed to Whitman's failings as a craftsman, and tied these failings to Whitman's sense of obligation to a rootless, democratic culture. Leaves of Grass, said Gosse, was intended to give the reader a section of "the ordinary daily life of a normal man"--

> and therefore properly falls, as every life does, occasionally into shapeless passages of mere commonplace or worse.

Gosse's hesitancy and detachment are clear enough. He predicted that Whitman would last; but he would last in spite of his formal inadequacies and his "theories about verse and democracy and religion." Somehow he had achieved beauty and "widened emotion."[1]

In 1892, in his Questions at Issue, Gosse again turned to Whitman. But now he characterized his poetry as "bastard jargon," "a return to barbarism," and in a chapter entitled "Has America

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[1] Academy, IX (June 24, 1876), 602-603.

Produced a Poet?" Whitman is not even mentioned.[1] Two years later he jabbed at Whitman's poems for presenting "a sort of Plymouth Bretherenism of form, a negation of all the laws and ritual of literature." The feeling of expansiveness and freedom was no longer enough to carry Gosse along. Whitman now seemed to him, not just unpolished, but incomplete, "an expanse of crystallisable substances" who spent his life "in a condition of literary solution...waiting for the structural change that never came."[2] Gosse was echoed somewhat later by Arthur Symons, who suggested that Whitman's "vast poetical nature" remained a nature and never formed an art.[3]

The art-for-art's-sake movement had been simmering in Victorian England since at least the 1860's as a natural consequence to the art-for-use dictum of the middle classes. Swinburne's Poems and Ballads was a kind of turning point, and Pater's prose laid down a critical and philosophical foundation. As the movement approached the nineties it had taken on modifications and definite characteristics. The substance of art, according to the aesthetes, was sensation intensified by passion; they had moved from detachment to the vita contemplativa towards "pure form" and an alliance with music and painting; increasingly they

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[1] London, 1892.

[2] New Review, X (April, 1894), 448-57.

[3] The Cafe Royal and Other Essays (London, n.d.), pp. 22-3.

emphasized the decorative and the arabesque.

"Form," said Oscar Wilde, "is everything. It is the secret of life."[1] "America," Oscar Wilde also said, "is one long expectoration." One American--Whistler, a Henry James in painter's frock with a tinge of the Bohemian--was part of the movement; James himself was on the fringe of it, and contributed some of his pieces to the decadent Yellow Book. We would expect from this, and from the natural antipathy between aestheticism and democratic culture, that Whitman would be badly treated by the aesthetes, if indeed they would notice him at all. But it did not happen this way. Perhaps it was only because daring rebels are birds of a feather, but Wilde, passionate lover of form, who expounded that rhyme is "the one chord we have added to the Greek lyre,"[2] was an admirer of Whitman, enemy of form and sounder of the barbaric yawp. To Wilde, too, Whitman was attractive as "the herald of a new era...a factor in the heroic and spiritual evolution of the human being."[3] The world that Whitman presaged detracted Wilde so completely from his natural orientation that he quite forgot about form: "In his very rejection of art Walt Whitman is an artist."[4] To Wilde it was the prophecy that mattered, not the performance.[5]

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[1]Oscar Wilde, Intentions (London, 1891), p. 201.

[2]Ibid., p. 103.

[3]Oscar Wilde, Reviews (London, 1908), p. 40.

[4]Ibid., p. 397. [5]Ibid., p.40.

Lionel Johnson was also caught in Whitman's spell. Thoroughly educated and severe in taste, so much so that Dixon Scott could observe that "life to a man like Johnson may well have seemed a rather hellish business,"[1] he became the devout worshipper of the raw American poet who celebrated the very grossness of human life. The factor here seems to be a religious and mystical one; it is obvious from his Winchester Letters, written between his sixteenth and eighteenth birthdays, that Johnson's readings in Leaves of Grass had much to do with the awakening of his religious emotions. "Read Whitman!" young Johnson wrote to a friend; "Jesus and Shelley and Whitman, they are steadfast in faith, never wavering."[2] Later, speaking of a friend who did not take to Whitman at all, this intensely serious schoolboy observed,

> Well, he would never be quite happy in my beautiful city of music and light and flowers and incense and Leaves of Grass--that is a visioned Hesperid island, never to be realized.[3]

The very intensity of Lionel Johnson's devotion to Whitman indicates its origin: the need for spiritual orientation, for a faith, in an age of lengthening shadows. Johnson was to fill the need later by his conversion to the Catholic Church. As artist and aesthete, however, Johnson felt mildly uneasy in the company of Whitman--or at least in the company of Whitman's English

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[1] Dixon Scott, Men of Letters (London, 1916), p. 237.

[2] Lionel Johnson, Some Winchester Letters (New York, 1919), p. 204.

[3] Ibid., p. 9.

advocates. In his book on Thomas Hardy, Johnson carefully distinguished himself from the less critical enthusiasts who praised Whitman as a fresh innovator. In honoring innovators like Spenser and Whitman, he argued, we do not honor first of all their innovation (which happens to be necessary for each because of changing times): Spenser is truly great when the spirit of old romance and the new spirit "meet without discord."

> And to consider Mr. Whitman: is he not then most a poet, when, forgetting the imagined new needs of his time and country, he chaunts simple, heroic things, with a 'large utterance,' almost Homeric?[1]

Oddly enough, the aesthetes paid less attention to the delicate skills of Henry James than to the loose and natural flashes of Whitman. We can speculate some reasons for this. For one thing, James wrote prose, not poetry; this might have made a difference. For another, James's reputation as a writer who could be measured by aesthetic standards was already well-established. Finally, though James was in many ways close to the spirit of the movement, his "realism"was a kind of embarrassment to it, carrying a suggestion of compromise.

But there was, of course, no antagonism towards James's artistic detachment or his exclusion of commonplace materials or his preoccupation with the refinement of refinement. These things allied him to the movement. The Yellow Book, in its short, stormy

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[1]Lionel Johnson, The Art of Thomas Hardy (London, 1923), new ed., p. 10.

life, not only published a few of James's stories; it also published two studies of his work. It praised his "elegance of style,"[1] naturally, and his "longing for perfection of form."[2] It elaborated his theme of the conflict between artist and society,[3] and defended him from "mass illiterate judgment"; it commended his deliberately ignoring the cheap tricks and hackneyed melodramatic situations of popular literature and his preference for "subtle emotions" and "bloodless situations."[4] But it went still further and discussed the advantages of his expatriation and his absorption in European culture; it accepted his orientation in memory and tradition and civilization. His writing, commented Lena Milman in her Yellow Book essay,

> is such a perfection of taste, as one would expect an ancient civilization to produce; and lo! an example of it, a very apostle of form, comes to us from over the Atlantic, beyond whose wave the forefathers of his race sought immunity from form....[5]

If we take the aesthetes as a whole, as a school, it is not at all difficult to catch them at a flagrant inconsistency. It is not really possible, without considerable explanation, to accept both Whitman and James, to send up a shout for freedom from form and yet to pay homage to its perfect discipline, to follow the prophet Whitman into a "new era," immune from the past, and

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[1] Yellow Book, II (July, 1894), p. 183. The author is P. G. Hammerton.

[2] Yellow Book, VII (October, 1895), p. 82.

[3] Ibid., p. 81. [4] Ibid., p. 73. [5] Ibid., p. 74.

yet to linger with James in the refinements of "rich, deep dark old Europe." The aesthetes, perhaps largely because they restricted the dimensions of the critic's job, did not see the problem of cultural orientation at all. Their own critical apparatus doomed them to an inconsistency. Once Whitman had lured them--with something other than shape and formal grace--they were too honest to let him go. It was as though the two Rossettis amalgamated into one person--a two-headed one. The neat, decorative frame of aesthetic criticism had been broken.

II.

Closely allied to the aesthetic movement and steeped in classical and mediaeval learning, John Addington Symonds would not appear to be a likely candidate for the school of what Swinburne contemptuously called "Whitmaniacs." He was, the DNB tells us, a "rigid cultivator of poetic form." He devoted eleven painstaking years to his History of the Italian Renaissance (1886). Sickly and consumptive, he poured tremendous energy into his work as a disseminator of the cultural tradition. He had his classics under the tutelage of Jowett; he translated Michelangelo and Campenella; he even translated mediaeval Latin student songs. Before he burned himself out at the age of fifty-three, he asked to be buried in his beloved Rome--under a Latin epitaph composed by his master, Jowett. He was at his best, Richard Garnett tells us in DNB, dealing with slightly decadent art. Had his path never crossed Whitman's, we can scarcely imagine the biting epithets

that Whitman would have had for him. Matthew Arnold, by contrast, was a fairly rugged Kansas town marshall.

But Symonds' path did cross Whitman's. He contributed a few important articles on Whitman to the periodicals, including an answer to Swinburne's "Whitmania" diatribe, and on the day of his death his London publisher put on the market his full-length book, Walt Whitman: A Study.

In reading Symonds we are again reminded of the startling figure Whitman must have cut as the blazing, meteoric prophet of a new world. The Victorian uncertainty and need for a sense of direction is again apparent. On superficial appearance, Symonds had buried himself in the past; actually, he too was looking for some ground to stand on. He thought he found what he was looking for in Whitman. Its substance was democracy and the return to Paradise.

A new literature for a totally new era: Symonds fully agreed. He regarded Whitman's notion of divinity in all things as "the secret of the democratic spirit."[1] And to manifest this imminence of the divine in the common is the primary duty of art "in the immediate future."

> While doing so...art will once more serve the permanent spiritual needs of humanity. This is Democratic Art. The kingdom of the Father has passed; the kingdom of the Son is passing; the kingdom of the Spirit begins.[2]

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[1]J. A. Symonds, Walt Whitman (London, 1893), p. 94.

[2]J. A. Symonds, Essays Speculative and Suggestive (London, 1890), II, 77.

This historical era of the kingdom of the spirit is obviously a natural outgrowth of the romantic revolution; it has been given a further push by "science, the sister of Democracy."

The new society which Symonds saw forming could not possibly feed on the earlier springs of inspiration.[1] Nor could it allow the risk of pollution from these earlier springs: "Three centuries since Shakespeare," Symonds commented, echoing Whitman, "have not sufficed to purge the English mind of Feudal notions."[2]

Symonds' view of this new age, and his optimistic enthusiasm for it, coincided exactly with Whitman's. It was to be an age "delivered from pedantry and blind reactionary fervour--delivered from dependence upon aristocratic and ecclesiastical authority--sharing the emancipation of the intellect by modern science...."[3] Man has finally reached the light; the whole of nature is now seen "for the first time with sane eyes."[4]

The language already makes obvious the fact that Symonds was following, not leading. He was always willing to acknowledge that Whitman was the leader, the prophet of the age. In 1889 he wrote Whitman that he has "long wished to write about [his] views regarding the literature of the future." The world stands indebted to Whitman for what he has done,

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[1] Symonds, Walt Whitman, pp. 119-20.

[2] Symonds, Essays Speculative..., II, 74-76.

[3] Ibid., II, 41. [4] Ibid.

> not only by asserting the necessity of a new literature adequate to the people and pregnant with the modern scientific spirit, but also by projecting and to a large extent realizing that literature in your own work.[1]

Symonds' affinity was so complete that not a single divergence can be found from Whitman's scattered statements on the nature and orientation of modern literature. He insisted that the faculty for seeing beauty in the simplest people and in the commonest things will, in the new age, have to be exercised "in a very different way, and with far other earnestness."[2] He welded the same link between democratic art and "realism"; he believed that "nothing in nature or in man is unpoetical"; he wanted no alternative to Whitman's worship of "spiritualized matter."

Symonds was astute enough to see that something was wrong with the arts in the Victorian age. He was concerned that art should continue to contribute to the intellectual nurture and moral sustenance of society.[3] This concern, coupled with his eager hope for a "new world" and his recognition of a rather grim kind of mechanized and materialistic world lying everywhere about him, brought him squarely against the problem of poet and public. It is best to quote him at length.

> In past epochs...the arts had a certain unconscious and spontaneous rapport with the nations which begat them, and with the central life-force of those nations at the moment of their flourishing.... Art expressed

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[1] Traubel, With Walt Whitman..., IV, 125-6.

[2] Symonds, Essays Speculative..., II, 71.

[3] Ibid., II, 153.

> what the people had of noblest and sincerest, and was appreciated by the people. No abrupt division separated the nation from the poets who gave a voice to the nation.[1]

He went on to show that "the case is altered now," that this rapport has been lost in the rapid upheaval of the nineteenth century. Part of the difficulty is, of course, the creation of a new and multitudinous reading public. The arts have not yet adjusted to this circumstance of social progress. They are still geared to an old world; they still presuppose that the demands have not changed. The poets and artists are

> living for the most part upon the traditions of the past...but taking no direct hold on the masses, of whom they are contentedly ignorant....[2]

After this perceptive analysis, Symonds was ready to frame his question:

> Is Democratic Art possible in these circumstances? Can we hope that [the artists] shall enter once again into vital rapport with the people who compose the nations...?[3]

Symonds answered his question with a loud affirmative. But he gave it a curious twist, born of a burning optimistic faith in the liberated masses. The artist, wrote Symonds, will find it difficult to elevate himself to the new heights demanded of him.

> An arduous task lies before poetry and the arts, if they are to bring themselves into proper relations with the people; not, as is vulgarly supposed, because

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[1] Symonds, Walt Whitman, p. 106.

[2] Ibid., p. 107. [3] Ibid., p. 108.

> the people will debase their standard, but because it will be hard for them to express the real dignity, and to satisfy the keen perceptions and the pure taste of the people.[1]

Notice that so far there is not a trace of disagreement between Whitman and Symonds. Perhaps we should pause at this point and consider how it is possible that this refined and slightly decadent scholar could subject himself so completely to the mystical leadership of an untaught, rugged primitivist who wished to flaunt learning and form and civilization at every turn.

Professor Blodgett, taking his cue from Havelock Ellis' study of Symonds and Whitman in his Sexual Inversion (Philadelphia, 1915), suggests that the whole answer is to be found in Symonds' homosexuality. That Symonds was deeply moved by the "manly love" and "comradeship" theme in the Calamus poems is perfectly obvious; he celebrated the theme in his own poetic tribute to Whitman, "Love and Death: A Symphony." His confessional letters on the subject were an embarrassment to Whitman, who was unwilling to face the full implications of the idea.[2] But surely this is only part of the answer. Even the most ardent passion to reform the world by homosexual comradeship would not commit a man of Symonds' attainments to chuck everything else and follow blindly into political and social and literary theories which are alien to him.

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[1] Symonds, Walt Whitman, p. 103.

[2] For the correspondence between Symonds and Whitman, see, in addition to Ellis, Traubel, op. cit., I, 74, 203, 388.

He would be giving up far more than he would have to give up. Homosexuality is part of the complex--but only part.

Is not the bigger pattern again the response of a man to the dizzying shifts and uncertainties of an age of conscious transition? Symonds, studying the past and writing books and climbing mountains with the same degree of furious energy, always drew himself as one given to morbid introspection.[1] He is a striking portrait of the lost man, the disoriented man, in the nineteenth century. It is even conceivable that the homosexuality to which critics attach so much importance is a symptom rather than a cause--a symptom of spiritual sickness and intellectual aimlessness. A sensitive man in such a condition might grasp at homosexuality, just as Hopkins grasped at divine love and spiritual discipline, Pater at the exotic sensations of the moment, or James Thomson at the bittersweet forgetfulness of alcoholic fog. But a man with Symonds' fine equipment would surely grasp at more than homosexuality, too. Admittedly suffering from a heavy case of Weltschmertz when he first encountered Leaves of Grass, Symonds thought he had found something to hang on to: a total vision of a new and meaningful world that made optimism "not unreasonable." Notice in Symonds' own account of his conversion to Whitman the total sweep of implications and the swiftness of the cure that the new orientation effected:

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[1] DNB.

> ...I was decidedly academical, and in danger of becoming a prig.... My academical prejudices, the literary instincts trained by two decades of Greek and Latin studies, the refinement of culture, and the exclusiveness of aristocratic breeding, revolted against the uncouthness, roughness, irregularity, and coarseness of the poet and his style. But in course of a short time, Whitman delivered my soul of these debilities.... /H/e taught me to comprehend the harmony between the democratic spirit, science, and the larger religion to which the modern world is being led by the conception of human brotherhood, and by the spirituality inherent in any really scientific view of the universe.... He inspired me with faith, and made me feel that optimism was not unreasonable.[1]

Devoted as he was to the new faith that freed him, Symonds could not entirely shake his training. Although he could not bring himself, "rigid cultivator of poetic form" that he was, to complain about Whitman's formlessness, he did balk slightly at Whitman's rejection of the past.

> It may...be doubted whether Whitman is wise in exhorting the miscellaneous population of North America to form a new culture which shall 'displace all that exists.'[2]

The same question disturbed him in his full-length study of Whitman:

> When we reflect what 'the small theatre of the antique, and the aimless sleep-walking of the Middle Ages,' to use Whitman's words, bequeathed to us of spiritual revelations, and compare these with the null or zero of American productivity, we could have preferred a more becoming modesty....[3]

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[1] Walt Whitman, pp. 157-9.

[2] Essays Speculative and Suggestive, p. 37.

[3] Walt Whitman, p. 128.

But Symonds was commenting here on the actual American literature of his time; throughout his writings he impatiently dismissed it, as he impatiently dismissed Whitman's lack of artistic balance, as though it were an annoying irrelevancy. His eye was optimistically on the future--where Whitman's was. The present lapses and deficiencies mattered very little. The new world and the new literature would inevitably come to pass; that hope, that dream was enough.

Edward Dowden's response to Whitman, though not complicated by hints of homosexuality, is remarkably like Symonds'.

Dowden was a respected literary scholar who spent his adult life as Professor of English at Trinity College, Dublin. His criticism was tolerant, broad in scope, and serious; it was characterized by a strong interest in ethical questions. But like Symonds and so many more Victorians, Dowden had his moments with the sickening sensation of being lost without maps. For him, too, the dreams of liberal optimism were a kind of anaesthesia, drugging out despair. In an age of tumbling faiths and dogmas, he needed some expansive optimism. But wherever he found it, he talked about it not as a truth but as a cure. At one moment he could see "Shelley with his eyes fixed upon the golden age to come" as a "representative of the democratic tendencies of art";[1] but by the end of the same essay on democratic art he could only

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[1]Edward Dowden, Studies in Literature (London, 1878), p. 480.

advise his readers that there was no suitable course but "to hope, to conjecture, to believe that this movement is progressive."[1] The Weltschmertz is apparent again; Dowden delights in observing that "nowhere in nature can [Whitman] find announcements of despair."[2] Indeed, Dowden first threw himself into Whitman's arms "because he was hopeful instead of despairing."[3]

Dowden's studies of Whitman are carefully analytical. One gets the feeling from them that the author is fighting with himself, trying to avoid getting carried away. They tend even to be dull--a characteristic which undoubtedly aided Whitman by making him "respectable" in the public eye.

But they are revealing. Dowden went more deeply than most critics into the question of tradition which Whitman's work raised. His defense of Whitman is painstaking and dignified. Like most critics, he began by complaining that the literature of Longfellow, Bryant, Irving, and Emerson is not sufficiently American; that there is, outside of Whitman,

> a hedge around the art and literature of America, enclosing a little paradise of European culture, refinement, and aristocratic delicatesse from the howling wilderness of American democracy.[4]

Scores of other critics had said this before Dowden. Like many of them, he regarded Whitman as the first and only American writer.

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[1] Studies in Literature, p. 518. [2] Ibid., p. 520.

[3] Blodgett, op. cit., p. 43.

[4] Studies in Literature, p. 469.

(He is awkwardly silent about the positions of Hawthorne and Melville relative to this hedge.) But Dowden moved further; he believed a new concept of art and of its relation to society was called for. The advent of democracy, he argued, has changed the entire picture. In a long discussion of the nature of democratic art, he set forth some of the following characteristics and beliefs by which he thought it must be recognized--all of them really re-statements of Whitman:

> Form and style modelled on traditional examples are little valued.... Each new generation...is a law to itself. Except public opinion, there is no authority on earth above the authority of a man's own soul.... [The writer] is permitted to be true to his own instincts, whether they are beautiful instincts or the reverse. The appeal which a work of art makes is to the nation, not to a class....[1]

In a parallel survey of the characteristics of art in an aristocratic society,[2] he showed his disapproval of ignoring, or condescending to, the common and actual; he despised the notion that great virtues are found only in the nobility. The whole structure of this culture must be swept away--to make room for a new culture.

> It must not, however, be supposed that Whitman sets himself against culture. He would, on the contrary, studiously promote culture, but a culture which has another ideal of character than that grown out of feudal aristocracies.... No conception of manhood can be appropriate unless it be of a kind which is suitable...to the uses...of the high average of men.[3]

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[1] Studies in Literature, pp. 481-2.

[2] Ibid., pp. 475-80. [3] Ibid., pp. 509-10.

The "ideal personality" in such a mass culture will be the "typical personality" which is "attainable by every man."[1]

Dowden did not concern himself with the difficulties that literature might encounter in such a society. Like Symonds, he refused to look at the literature of America outside of Whitman for indications of what might happen. The actual mattered less than the dream; the democratic world of which Whitman was the herald was "as yet but half-fashioned."[2] It was "perpetually moving," and man could only hope that the movement was progressive. It seemed to be important for Dowden to feel that the changing world could move hopefully in some direction. If the world got where Dowden hoped it was going, the writers would be clear of any problems with the public; public opinion would function responsibly as the final authority in matters of literary judgment.

But Dowden's caution and hesitancy in handling Whitman may be the protest of the scholar in him against the desperately hopeful dreamer in him. For example, he could not bring himself to call Whitman's writing either poetry or verse.[3] He may well have feared the consequences literature might suffer in exchanging its heritage for an illusory certitude.

Dowden outlived Symonds by twenty years. Might he too not

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[1] Studies in Literature, p. 510.

[2] Ibid., p. 474. [3] Ibid., p. 484.

have felt in the fin de siecle and its aftermath the vanity and the airiness of the hope to which he had clung? We have noticed elsewhere a wistful, melancholic sense of disillusionment among the liberals at the turn of the present century. It is best revealed in the dying or changing liberal periodicals, and it is an important part of the preface to the "new poets" of the twentieth century. It was in this calm and introspective period, in the calm before the ravaging storm of the Great War, that Dowden last referred to Whitman. In a letter written in 1910 he confessed that he would now have approached Whitman with much more reservation.[1]

III.

Much of the scholarly interest in Whitman among Victorians seems to have been stimulated by the respected Dowden, whose long and careful study appeared in the Westminster in 1871. A few other scholarly critics followed, among them Professor George Saintsbury in 1874 and two young friends of Dowden's, Standish O'Grady and Thomas W. Rolleston. Significantly, Victorian professors and scholars had much less to say about James than about Whitman.

Saintsbury, a busy reviewer, dealt with both of them. His reaction to Whitman is an odd reversal of the pattern that unfolds

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[1]Edward Dowden, Letters, ed. E. D. and H. M. Dowden (London, 1914), p. 364.

in most critics of his time. It was quite customary to talk in superlatives about the magnificence of Whitman's cosmic and social vision, and to quietly sweep questions of form and prosody under the rug. But Saintsbury, temperamentally a stable conservative, had far more respect for Whitman's art than for his vision; it was the way the vision was embodied that appealed to him.

He did think that Whitman's view of culture deserved attention. He studied it at some length in a review in the Academy. He was suspicious of Whitman's passion for admitting into art "nothing but what is open to every human being of ordinary faculty and opportunities." Whitman, noted Saintsbury, "cares not that by this limitation he may exclude thoughts and feelings ...infinitely higher and choicer than any which he admits." Saintsbury could not admire Whitman's ideal man, "the divine average," who is "almost entirely uncultured" and is "above all things firmly resolved to admit no superior." To Saintsbury's mind, uncharmed by liberal panaceas, this was careless talk. He concluded the article with a deliberate piece of superb understatement:

> One is inclined...to opine that whatever salvation may await the world may possibly come from quarters other than America.[1]

But Saintsbury's literary judgment rode above his intellect.

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[1] Academy, VI (October 10, 1874), 398-400.

He was not embarrassed to admire Whitman as a man and as a poet. He was one of the original six contributors to the fund which W. M. Rossetti collected for Whitman in 1885.[1] In the same review in which he attacked Whitman's brand of democratic culture, he praised the rhythms of Whitman's poetry--"singularly fresh, light, and vigorous."[2] In his erudite History of English Prosody, published thirty years after the review, he cited Whitman's prosody as "a true marriage of matter and form."[3]

Saintsbury's reflections on Henry James are not very revealing. He did not see the possibility of James's detached European orientation serving as a counter to Whitman's rejection of tradition and civilization. He had his chance in a review of James's Hawthorne. He approved of the book, but his complaint that James pays too little attention to Hawthorne's books and too much attention to the man suggests that Saintsbury failed to see James's theme and purpose.[4] The same kind of myopia confused Saintsbury when he was confronted with James's severe objectivity; he wondered, for example, why James in writing Daisy Miller made no effort to make his American characters attractive.[5] From this

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[1] W. M. Rossetti, Letters Concerning Whitman, p. 155.

[2] Academy, VI (Oct. 10, 1874), 399.

[3] Quoted by Blodgett, p. 187.

[4] Academy, XVII (January 17, 1880), 40-1.

[5] Academy, XV (March 22, 1879), 256.

point on, Saintsbury's objections to James are the stock objections of his contemporaries: over-refined dissection and distillation.[1]

John Nichol, Professor of English at Glasgow University, was the first academic Briton to devote an entire book to American literature. His interest in the subject suggests more a search for meaningful patterns in the century than it suggests idle curiosity in a new "field." He was looking for something as well as at something. As a student at Oxford he had founded the Old Mortality Society, in which he was closely associated with T. H. Green, Swinburne, Dicey, and other kindred "spirits of flame." He was an earnest liberal, pro-Mazzini and pro-Yankee, active in the "liberal cause" at Glasgow. But in his later years his devotion to liberalism began to wane, and he finally drifted into political conservatism.[2]

Some of the ambivalence towards liberal and conservative views can be detected in his American Literature, written when Nichol was in his early fifties.[3] There is a hint of hopefulness in his apologetic explanation that the American people "have had

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[1] Academy, XV (May 10, 1879), 408; XXXVIII (Aug. 23, 1890), 148.

[2] DNB.

[3] The book was published in 1885, when Nichol was fifty-two. It was an expansion of an article which he had written three years earlier for the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

to act their Iliad, and they have not yet had time to sing it."[1] He was attracted by the potentialities that a democratic culture, cut off from Europe, offered to literature. "Foremost among its most attractive features is its freshness, its freedom from restraint...and authority."[2] European literature, in contrast, is constantly threatened by tyranny; European writers "wear their traditions like a chain...and the creative powers are depressed."[3] But Nichol had his reservations, too. He saw the dangers of hack commercialization, and he was sure that such a literature would sacrifice depth to breadth.[4]

Nichol's fears for a free, traditionless literature become manifest in his attitude towards Whitman. Here already, Nichol felt, the freedom had gone to excess. Whitman he regarded as "a writer of great force...ruined as an artist by his contempt for art."[5] Though Nichol apparently wanted the writer to be free from the tyranny of civilization, he could not "acquiesce in [Whitman's] denial of all that civilization has done to raise man above the savage or the chimpanzee."[6] "If Shakespeare, Keats, and Goethe are poets, Whitman is not."[7]

Nichol would have been wise to leave James out of his study. He had no ear at all for the satirical nuances in James. He

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[1] American Literature (Edinburgh, 1885), p. 15.

[2] Ibid., p. 446. [3] Ibid. [4] Ibid., p. 447.

[5] Ibid., p. 210. [6] Ibid., p. 211. [7] Ibid., p. 210.

repeated the common critical witticism that James's craftsmanship was "too good"; we can only wonder if Nichol believed it. He missed completely all trace of satire in The American[1] and complained of Roderick Hudson's "Walt Whitman-like bluster about his art"[2]--apparently not realizing that this speech was meant to speak for Whitman and not for James.

Apparently the academic critics in the Victorian age who did take an interest in American literature were concerned primarily with the Redskin tradition, with the exciting possibilities of a new, democratic literature. For this reason Henry James, who offered no new vision of a distinctly modern literature (so it was thought), was given only passing notice, as in Nichol's book, or was ignored. Arthur Christopher Benson was one of the first academics to deal seriously with James; his criticism falls, in kind as well as in date, into twentieth century criticism. He emphasized James's method of detachment:

> Henry James is never the impassioned advocate, advancing the baser point of view by means of an intellectual sympathy. He has the passionless insight of Shakespeare; he does not skilfully present the case of his puppets; he simply embodies them.[3]

But between Saintsbury and Benson, there is no significant criticism of James from the professors and the scholars.

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[1] American Literature, pp. 389-391. [2] Ibid., p. 393.

[3] A. C. Benson, Memories and Friends (London, 1924), p. 202.

In contrast, a number of them were interested in Whitman. We have already mentioned Powell, George C. Macaulay, Dowden, Saintsbury, and Nichol. R. L. Nettleship, a highly respected professor of philosophy whose work in Greek idealism is still valuable, had a high regard for Whitman's poems; he found in them, according to A. C. Bradley, a sense of vitality which the academic world could not afford, a naked touch of reality.[1] John Todhunter, like Dowden a Dublin professor, cited Hugo, Shelley, and Walt Whitman as the three great poets of democracy.[2]

Dowden seems to have turned the intellectual world of the seething Dublin of the 1870's into a kind of hot-bed of Whitmanism. He and Todhunter were not alone. In the mid-1880's Hopkins was there--he might possibly be the cleric whom Dowden describes to Whitman, the cleric "who halves his truth between Newman and you."[3] And there were also two young friends of Dowden, Standish O'Grady and Thomas W. Rolleston.

O'Grady, along with Rolleston, an important figure in the Celtic Revival, published an article on Whitman in The Gentleman's Magazine in 1875 under the pen-name of Arthur Clive. The article, "Walt Whitman, the Poet of Joy," bristles with hopeful young energy. O'Grady, like Dowden, found in Whitman a tonic for

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[1] R. L. Nettleship, Philosophical Lectures and Remains, ed. A. C. Bradley (London, 1911), pp. 30, 43.

[2] John Todhunter, A Study of Shelley (London, 1880).

[3] Blodgett, p. 122.

uncertainty. The article is a spirited renunciation of nineteenth century melancholy, the strain of which, O'Grady argued, began with Byron and his contemporaries. The world has had too much of it; what is needed is the optimism of Whitman's cosmic vision.

> His eye sees beauty, his ear hears music. All things grow lovely under his hand: deformity, ugliness, and all things miserable and vile disappear.[1]

O'Grady's friend Rolleston was a scholarly, almost pedantic man who spent a good deal of time in Germany. He translated Leaves of Grass into German, corresponded with Whitman, and collaborated with H. B. Cotterill on a pamphlet, Über Wordsworth und Walt Whitman, Zwei Vorträge Gehalten vor dem Literarischen Verein zu Dresden (Dresden, 1884) --a study which attempted to show that Whitman was not a barbaric primitivist but a poet of profound intellect who was closely akin to German idealism. At the time of Whitman's death, Rolleston contributed a eulogistic obituary to the Academy.[2] He praised Whitman, a poet of "peace and hope," as "the greatest American." Again in Rolleston we have a serious scholar who is drawn irresistibly to the hopefulness of Whitman's dream. Whitman's poems, he said, expressed "the whole life of a modern man, living, a democrat, in the midst of a great democratic society." His estimate of Whitman as an artist avoids both rapture and ridicule; it is balanced and just. To defend Whitman's

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[1] Gentleman's Magazine, XV (Dec., 1875), 704-716.

[2] Academy, XLI (April 2, 1892), 325-7.

form, wrote Rolleston,

> is impossible--to attack it looks like a sort of ignoratio elenchi.... Whitman's writings have the form which the creative instinct supplies for itself from within--little or none of that which the decorative instinct imposes from without. I would rather he had both: the greatest art is a union of the two.

But he did find in Whitman's poetry (his shift from pure form to the spirit and content formed is typical) "native power" and "the immense uplifting tide of elemental life." It was the uplifting tide that impressed Rolleston most. With an humility that would have pleased Whitman, he concluded that Whitman's poems were beyond the reach of scholars like himself; they were filled with "things that are nothing and mean everything."

It should be obvious that the Victorian scholars who dealt with American literature saw very clearly its attempt to re-orient both itself and society. For many of them this was attractive enough: they took to Whitman because he offered hope, freshness, a magnificent vision, a way home from the darkling plain of Victorian uncertainty. For John Nichol this was not quite enough; his hope for an alternative, a new orientation, was strong, but he did not have the faith to believe that Whitman had found it. Saintsbury, essentially at home in the European tradition, rejected it completely but accepted the form and cadence that Whitman had found for it. Significantly, in looking to American literature the scholars gave little attention to James. The alternative he represented, essentially Arnoldian, was not recognized as an alternative, one that Americans could nurture more

easily than could Europeans. He did not seem to be offering a "way out," but instead a sterile and arty dissection. He must have seemed, even, insipidly European. He was not what the scholars were looking for.

IV.

No writer leaves us with a more puzzling attitude towards Whitman than does Robert Louis Stevenson. He was at times an intense but vague admirer; his dissention from Whitman was often clouded in comedy and in undertone. And if we try to move on from there to his bigger view of the needs of modern literature, we are left gasping. For here is a young Victorian who can acknowledge Walt Whitman as one of the two major influences upon his life--and who can also claim to have been Henry James's closest friend, one-half of a tender and inspiring literary friendship of which James was the other half, "the sole and single Anglo-Saxon," James had said, capable of seeing how well a James novel was written.[1] The two sides of the American dialogue met in Stevenson as they met in no other Victorian.

He would have a natural affinity with what he called Whitman's "outdoor atmosphere of sentiment."[2] He was attracted to

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[1]Janet Adam Smith, ed., Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of Friendship and Criticism (London, 1948), p. 27.

[2]Stevenson, Familiar Studies of Men and Books (London, 1882), p. 105.

Whitman in part because Whitman believed that the poet "must testify to the livableness of life."[1] This interest in Whitman he shared with Henley, who included four selections from Whitman in his Lyra Heroica: A Book of Verse for Boys.[2] Stevenson, a frail invalid who preached what his friend William Archer called "athletico-aestheticism," wanted to break through the growing gloom of his generation, a gloom that to him was intolerable.

> Young gentlemen with three or four hundred a year of private means look down from a pinnacle of doleful experience on all the grown and hearty men who have dared to say a good word for life since the beginning of the world. There is no prophet but the melancholy Jacques, and the blue devils dance on all our literary wires.[3]

His own sense of joy in assertive living was one antidote; Whitman's exuberance was another.

But there was also in Stevenson something of the natural rebel. Like Whitman, he was a Bohemian;[4] like Whitman, again, he

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[1]Stevenson, Familiar Studies..., p. 103.

[2]Henley's interest in Whitman is to be expected. His "Englandism," says a critic, "approximates Walt Whitman's concept of an American race destined to emerge from the placement of a liberated protestant spirit in an almost infinite geographical vastitude." [J. H. Buckley, William Ernest Henley: A Study in the "Counter-Decadence" of the Nineties (Princeton, 1945), p. 136.] But the interest did not carry him very wide or very deep. There is no mention of Whitman in his writings; and although he gave Whitman six pages in Lyra Heroica, he gave Longfellow twenty pages.

[3]Stevenson, op. cit., p. 102.

[4]"That Stevenson was throughout his life fascinated by the Bohemian ideal is well known: it is not so well known that he

believed that the world was being and had to be newly emancipated. New thought, new moral relationships, a new orientation to the universe--and hence a new literature--had to take shape. The sense of transition from a settled world to a cold and confused one disturbed Stevenson deeply; "science carries us into zones of speculation where there is no habitable city for the mind of man."[1] To drown out the ennui and the maddening fear, Stevenson fused his Bohemianism and his athleticism into a code of loyalty and human dignity in which heroism was still possible--a stoical code of dignified endurance surprisingly and instructively like Hemingway's.

It was for the sense of liberation, for the vision of a new, free, courageous world, that Stevenson, in youth and in maturity, thanked Whitman. In his "Books That Have Influenced Me" he called Leaves of Grass

> A book of singular service, a book which tumbled the world upside down for me, blew into space a thousand cobwebs of genteel and ethical illusion, and, having thus shaken my tabernacle of lies, set me back again upon a strong foundation of all the original and manly virtues.[2]

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practiced it during his student days at Edinburgh to the fullest extent." [David Daiches, Robert Louis Stevenson (Norfolk, Conn., 1947), p. 19.]

[1] "Pulvis et Umbra," in Bowyer and Brooks, The Victorian Age (New York, 1954), p. 778.

[2] Stevenson, Works (London, 1907), XV, 304.

This feeling for newness is constant in Stevenson's writings. In a fragment of autobiography, written in San Francisco in 1880, he reflected upon his "awakening," circa 1871: "I date my new departure from three circumstances: natural growth, the coming of friends, and the study of Walt Whitman."[1] Although the manuscript breaks off before getting to Whitman, Balfour records some notes from one of its earlier pages:

> Whitman: Humanity: L.J.R.: love of mankind: sense of inequality: justification of art: decline of religion: I take to the New Testament: change startling: growing desire for truth: Spencer: should have done better with the New Test."[2]

Much of the turbulence of Stevenson's awareness of the demands of a new world is packed into this quick sketch of notes. If we gloss it sufficiently to note that "New Testament" probably refers to Leaves of Grass (Stevenson titled his first essay "The Gospel According to Walt Whitman") and that "L.J.R." is a reference to the restricted, highly secret Edinburgh club of six members devoted to radical principles and the abolition of the House of Lords[3] --and if we also note here another expression of Stevenson's indebtedness to Spencer[4] in the context of his preoccupation with

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[1]Graham Balfour, Life of Robert Louis Stevenson (London, 1901), I, 86.

[2]Ibid., p. 94.

[3]Ibid., p. 90 n. The letters are presumed to stand for Liberty, Justice, and Reverence.

[4]Stevenson acknowledged his indebtedness to Spencer in "Books Which Have Influenced Me." Cf. also Balfour, pp. 94, 97, 98.

such questions as "inequality," "decline of religion," and "justification of art"--we can see the great deal of coincidence between Whitman in America and the young Stevenson in Edinburgh. Both were looking at a new world.

Stevenson was nowhere very explicit about the nature of the literature of this new world, or about its point of departure from conventional literature. In "The Lantern Bearers," he came close to Whitman's ideal in envisioning a literature which would be optimistic, democratic, and breathing the idea of "the divine in the common":

> The artistic temperament (a plague on the expression!) does not make us different from our fellow-men, or it would make us incapable of writing novels; and the average man (a murrain on the word!) is just like you or me, or he would not be average. It was Whitman who stamped a kind of Birmingham sacredness upon the latter phrase; but Whitman knew very well, and showed very nobly, that the average man was full of joys and full of poetry of his own. And this harping on life's dullness and man's meanness is a loud profession of incompetence; it is one of two things: the cry of the blind eye, I cannot see, or the complaint of the dumb tongue, I cannot utter.[1]

But Whitman himself, for all his inspirational value, could never fully satisfy Stevenson. Increasingly he was torn between admiration and mistrust. At the age of twenty-three he was heady with Whitman's influence and was trying to complete an essay on him for publication. In this period he was wildly enthusiastic.[2]

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[1]Stevenson, Across the Plains (London, 1903), p. 222.

[2]Stevenson, Letters, ed. Sir Sidney Colvin (London, 1924), I, 64, 81, 123.

But he had great difficulties with it; when he finally fought his way through and completed the article five years later, he had produced something cool, measured, non-committal. John Addington Symonds explained this away as a stylistic difficulty[1] --but such an explanation only avoids examining the specific points upon which Stevenson is hesitant or critical.

The essay is, indeed, a curious mixture of tones and styles. In reprinting it (1882) Stevenson apologized for it, calling it a piece "conceived in the noisiest extreme of youthful eloquence."[2] But if this suggests that it was dashed off with youthful impudence, the statement is very misleading. The letters written between 1873 and 1878 reveal the young Stevenson in earnest and decisive struggle with his subject. It is indecision and not stylistic inadequacy that makes the piece uneven. The tone of energetic discovery and revelation, when it falls off, falls off unnaturally into comedy. The redeeming prophet Whitman is suddenly "a large, shaggy dog, just unchained, scouring the beaches of the world and baying at the moon."[3] Or otherwise the

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[1]"My friend, Mr. R. L. Stevenson, once published a constrained and measured study of Walt Whitman, which struck some of those who read it as frigidly appreciative. He subsequently told me that he had first opened upon the keynote of a glowing panegyric, but felt the pompous absurdity of its exaggeration. When the essay was finished in his second style, he became conscious that it misrepresented his own enthusiasm...." (J. A. Symonds, Walt Whitman, pp. 9-10.)

[2]Men and Books, "Preface," p. v.

[3]Ibid., p. 92.

tone shifts to light sarcasm--so light that we cannot be sure what the author's own point is. For example, Stevenson says that Whitman

> conceived the idea of a literature...which was to be, first, human, and next, American; which was to be brave and cheerful as per contract; to give culture in a popular and poetical presentment; and, in so doing, catch and stereotype some democratic ideal of humanity which should be equally natural to all grades of wealth and education, and suited, in one of his favorite phrases, to "the average man."[1]

He could not quite accept Whitman's claim to the office of democratic bard. He mistrusted, for example, Whitman's persistent scrutiny of his own bearings in the world and his insistence upon preaching "his theory of poetry."[2] Nor could he take seriously the picture of this revolutionary, this obviously attractive spiritual hero, in the mantle of a poet: "Whitman loses our sympathy in the character of a poet by attracting too much of our attention in that of a Bull in a China Shop."[3]

Whitman seems to have stimulated Stevenson without converting him. As Stevenson matured, he did not forget his indebtedness, and willingly acknowledged it to the world in "Books That Have Influenced Me." But as he matured he also moved further from Whitman. His tragic vision deepened. "Pulvis et Umbra" was written ten years after "The Gospel According to Walt Whitman." And in the meantime Stevenson had changed in another way: he

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[1] Men and Books, p. 94.

[2] Ibid. [3] Ibid., p. 125.

became, with Henry James, one of the most conscious and deliberate literary craftsmen of the Victorian age.

That strange, deep, sensitive friendship between James and Stevenson, admirably enshrined in Janet Adam Smith's edition of the writers' correspondence, did not only begin with the mutual respect of two writers for the craft of writing. The mutual understanding and love of craft nurtured the friendship right up to Stevenson's death. The touching details--Stevenson's pride in his "Henry James Chair" at Skerryvore, the support and encouragement that two lonely craftsmen could give each other with happy letters that went half-way around the world, the dignified sorrow of James's letters to Fanny Stevenson and to Colvin when Stevenson died--suggest how far from Whitman Stevenson had moved. The vitalism and courage were part of him to the end. But increasingly, in form and content, Stevenson was interested in discipline and hardness. Craftsmanship was also a way of life. There was more to Stevenson than the manly cheerfulness which is celebrated by gurgling school-mistresses. His vision deepened to a sense of tragedy and evil, the sense of human depravity that his Presbyterian background had given him as a child, when he would lie awake nights shuddering at "the evil spirit that was abroad."[1] Colvin, who did much to propagate the image of Stevenson's courageous cheerfulness, came upon him once in the garden at Skerryvore

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[1]Smith, ed., James and Stevenson, p. 35.

and saw "a face of utter despondency, nay tragedy, upon which seemed stamped for one concentrated moment the expression of all he had ever had, or might yet have, in life to suffer or to renounce."[1] It is like James's lifelong "sense of the abyss beneath the fragile surface." Stevenson's depraved Mr. Hyde, who could collide with a little girl at a street-corner, trample calmly over the child's body, and leave her screaming in the street, would have no place in the optimistic world of unleashed human individuality that Whitman prophesied. Evil requires discipline, and the literary treatment of evil requires complexity of devices, form, skill, craftsmanship. Stevenson was driven to a sparse life of artistic dedication by his own half-formed vision of the world. Whitman's democratic heaven was an idle wish, a hopeless panacea. In an age of loose and contrived and superficial novels (Wells, Kipling, and Arnold Bennett, for example), Stevenson and James needed each other.

Those complex feelings in Stevenson which drove him towards James drove him further back from any real faith he might have shared with Whitman in the mass of ordinary men. In 1886 he expressed this to Gosse:

> What the public likes is work (of any kind) a little loosely executed; so long as it is a little wordy, a little slack, a little dim and knotless, the dear public likes it.... There must be something wrong in me, or I would not be popular.[2]

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[1] Smith, ed., James and Stevenson, p. 35. [2] Ibid., p. 28.

And in 1893, the year before he died, his language was even stronger--stronger, too, than Henry James's. The ambivalent hope of "The Lantern-Bearers" in the joys and poetry of the average man had died out. Now Stevenson spoke of the public in this way:

> the British pig returns to his true love, the love of the styleless, of the shapeless, of the slapdash and the disorderly.[1]

V.

There were a few periodicals in the age which were detached enough from class and party to deserve attention in this chapter.

The most important of them is the Academy. Founded in 1869 by Charles E. C. B. Appleton, it was in fact the kind of "national academy" that Arnold had called for in his Culture and Anarchy: a "centre of informed critical opinion." It was a cross between the modern literary supplement and the modern scholarly journal. Among its contributors were Saintsbury, E. K. Chambers, Henry Bradley, Walter Skeat, Augustine Birrell, and Mark Pattison. Although the Academy found it necessary to dilute its intentions and broaden its appeal gradually, it held to fairly high standards of disinterested quality until 1896, when it changed hands and became a merely popular magazine.[2] It held surprisingly well to the policy it announced in 1870: to judge books, "not from an insular,

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[1]Smith, ed., James and Stevenson, p. 28.

[2]John C. Johnson, The Academy, 1869-1896 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1958).

still less from a partisan, but from a cosmopolitan point of view...."[1]

Still, we should remember that the Academy was not completely above political prejudices. No periodical is. It leaned more towards the liberal than the conservative viewpoint. In dealing with American democracy, for example, it attacked the conservative estimates of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen[2] and Sir Henry Maine;[3] it gave only mild approval to Lecky;[4] but it called Lord Bryce's American Commonwealth, which attempted to dispel Tocqueville's thesis about the tyranny of the majority, "one of the few great books of our time."[5] A careful student of the Academy has concluded that "Throughout the years from 1869 to 1896 there were more regular reviewers who supported democracy (though sometimes with strong reservations) than there were those who feared it or held it in contempt."[6]

But in spite of a thinly visible political stamp, the Academy was more of an ivory tower for Victorian scholars and belletrists than were most of its rival publications.

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[1] Academy, II (Oct. 22, 1870), 1.

[2] IV (Aug. 1, 1873), 294.

[3] XXVIII (Nov. 7, 1885), 300.

[4] XLIX (May 2, 1896), 358.

[5] XXXV (Jan. 26, 1889), 49.

[6] John C. Johnson, op. cit., p. 182.

What did it make of Whitman? Apparently the Academy did not think much of Whitman as a symbol and a prophet of cultural reorientation. But it did show him more respect than did many Victorian journals. We have already seen Saintsbury's Academy reviews: a rejection of Whitman's theories coupled with a rare defense of his prosody.[1] The journal continued to be tolerant of Whitman. In 1889 it stated its pleasure in the fact that Whitman was getting some well-deserved attention, especially in Great Britain.[2] A year later it gave its opinion that "Whitman's capacity for inspiration, for prophecy, and for hope is very far ahead of his literary sense"--a reversal of Saintsbury's 1875 estimate. But the last review of Whitman in the Academy was not so far from that 1875 review, after all:

> For those who reject the prophet there yet remains
> the imperishable singer; though it is better still
> both to share his song and believe his vision.[3]

By 1890, it was difficult to "believe his vision," but almost customary to wish that one could believe it.

The Academy reviewed Henry James's works several times. Graphically, its attitude towards James could be represented by a wavy line which rises steadily for ten years and then suddenly falls. Significantly, James fell from favor only after the

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[1]See above, pp. 309-11.

[2]Academy, XXXV (Feb. 23, 1889), 127.

[3]XXXVII (April 5, 1890), 231-232.

magazine had been sold into more commercially ambitious hands--that is, after 1896.

In 1875, reviewing a collection of James's early stories about artists (including the thematically important "Madonna of the Future," which the reviewer liked), the Academy found James reminiscent of, but not imitative of, Hawthorne, and commended him for "entering into Hawthorne's psychology."[1] Another review in the same year got hold of the dramatic significance of James's use of Europe: "There is something pathetic--a sense of yearning as for a birthright withheld...."[2] But it found Roderick Hudson (1876) weak and unrealized,[3] and The American confusing, Balzacian, and uninteresting.[4]

The Academy's first real praise of James came in 1878--early praise, as the pattern of James reviews goes. In reviewing The Europeans, it turned out a very perceptive analysis of James's objective method, pointed out his similarity to Turgenev, and acclaimed his careful suppression of the petty, the obvious, the merely descriptive, and the non-essential. It called The Europeans, with a rare burst of the superlative, "the purest piece of realism ever done."[5]

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[1] Academy, VII (June 12, 1875), 602.

[2] VIII (Oct. 16, 1875), 399.

[3] IX (Feb. 12, 1876), 142-3.

[4] XII (July 14, 1877), 3.

[5] XIV (Oct. 12, 1878), 354.

The review of Portrait of a Lady (1881) is somewhat cooler. James's narrative technique is again carefully explored and respected--but the reviewer was apparently disturbed by James's growing disdain for plot, the "popular element" of fiction.[1] If this was a slur on James, it was redeemed three years later. The Academy defended James from his critics, especially his English critics, who had been "underrating" him. It was James's stance as an American that the critics had overlooked--and James was clearly an American, American in a sense in which Longfellow and even Hawthorne can never be American. This review must have pleased James considerably:

> I am afraid that Mr. James is guilty only of being a good deal keener and cleverer than our own authors, and of writing--as he ought--from his own and not our standpoint.[2]

Not many critics in the mid-1880's were talking that way about Henry James.

In the final decade of the original Academy's life, James was not often mentioned. After 1896, after the sale of the magazine, he fell fast. The standards of mass culture could not be very amenable. He was attacked for writing "for the few";[3] The Sacred Fount was compared unfavorably to Dreiser's Sister Carrie and dismissed as a reductio ad absurdum.[4] And inevitably, the Academy

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[1] Academy, XX (Nov. 26, 1881), 397-8.

[2] XXVI (Dec. 6, 1884), 371.

[3] LI (Feb. 27, 1897), 256.

[4] LXI (Nov. 9, 1901), 429.

with the new face attacked "the essential artistic arrogance of Mr. James's attitude towards his readers."[1]

The Athenaeum, another review with high intellectual aims, a review which began its career with an attack on the Quarterly's policy of mixing politics and critical judgment, had very little to say about Whitman. Though it had no real critical "policy," it was generally favorable to American literature, and approved mildly of the novels of Henry James. Its objections to James were the usual ones--heavy handling of trivial issues, "art for art's sake" themes, thinness, and lack of development.[2] It did see the importance of William Wetmore Story in relation to James's own attitude towards Europe--"it is the relation of the American to Europe intellectually and artistically that constitutes Mr. James's theme"--and it felt assured that James had solved his own problem in a very satisfactory way.[3]

The Bookman, a late-comer which can hardly be called Victorian at all, did a great deal to give some luster to James in the 1890's and in the first decade of the twentieth century. In polished, incisive reviews it made observations like this (to take a few at random):

> Two-thirds of the charm lies in his characteristic style, his mosaic of little phrases...and his

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[1]LXIII (Nov. 8, 1902), 494.

[2]Athenaeum, No. 2658 (Oct. 5, 1878), 431; No. 3274 (July 26, 1890), 124.

[3]No. 3967 (Nov. 3, 1903), 605-6.

> refreshing confidence in the reader's intelligence. He does not explain; he indicates....[1]
>
> [The reader] must take time and trouble. There is no other living writer who could have written [The Awkward Age], who could so patiently and delicately labour to make a fine point, who could deal so sensitively with fine shades, who could analyze the slight so subtly, so wittily.[2]
>
> Of the style, of the subtlety, of the minute care and delicate weaving it is impossible to speak too highly.[3]

And in one review, the Bookman tried to accommodate James to the public with a brilliant explanation of James's "impressionistic" technique.[4] But there was often a sudden, condescending twist at the end of the Bookman's laudatory explanations of James's excellence. Brilliant as James's novels might be, there was always a public to think about. Two of the passages quoted above end in this way:

> There is infinite grace in the detail; there is genuine fun in the observation. But taken as a whole the effect is clumsy and even wearisome. There is ten times too much good stuff. He works a delicate theme to death.[5]
>
> Every one must praise James...the later James...but need we read him? ...The line which separated James from a chess-player is getting very thin.[6]

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[1] Bookman, XIV (Sept., 1898), 166.

[2] XVI (Jan., 1899), 81.

[3] LIII (Dec., 1917), 107.

[4] XXXIX (Nov., 1910), 96.

[5] XVI (Jan., 1899), 81.

[6] LIII (Dec., 1917), 107.

Murray's Magazine, which had published a warm (but not very distinctive) article on Whitman in 1877 and had seen perhaps more than any other critical organ what James was driving at in The Tragic Muse,[1] gave thirteen pages in 1891 to one of the most distinguished articles on James to appear in the century. The article is the first piece of criticism on James to grasp fully and appreciate whole-heartedly the objectivity of James's method. This article is worth looking at in detail; it may be more than coincidence that a number of critics began taking James more seriously after 1891.

The article begins by taking account of the fact that James is not a popularly accepted novelist. He will probably always be denied "the honour of the railway bookstore, or the seventy-thousandth copy of the cheap edition." But this is because he remains objective, aloof from his characters; and the objectivity is the secret of his art. But, the author insists, he cannot be accused of willful obscurity. And then follows a refreshingly extreme statement: "As a fact, we believe that Mr. James flatters his public too much."[2]

It is James's "faultless skill" that makes him an artist.[3] In considering him it is necessary in a very special way to separate the man from the artist. He does not "put his whole soul

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[1] Murray's Magazine, VIII (Sept. 1890), 431-2.

[2] Ibid., X (Nov. 1891), 645. [3] Ibid., p. 648.

into the work"--true enough. But Murray's, joining James in bucking the expressionist tide in Victorian criticism, thought it folly to attack him for this; "...it is his supreme distinction that he invariably includes and excludes as an artist, not as a man."[1]

> In speaking of the work of Mr. Henry James, the first, the imperative thing to be said about it is that it is the work of an artist, and of one with a complete and exhaustive knowledge of his art and resources. Whilst no writer is more vividly modern, Mr. James is, in a sense, an artist as an ancient Greek was an artist; he represses systematically, that is to say, his own personality in view of the work on which he is engaged. By the public, and--shall we say?--by the English public in particular, this supreme quality of workmanship is one of the qualities least esteemed and least appreciated. The generous public hates the Augur's mask; it likes to peep and see the human countenance behind, to shake hands, so to speak, with the wearer, and congratulate him, on having a soul like his own.[2]

James's unique artistry, the article goes on to argue, is a uniquely American contribution to literature. It has the American national stamp upon it--particularly when James is dealing with his international themes. There is a vague

> but no less certain breath of what we may venture to term the American tradition that flutters through Mr. James's volumes; a breath too little deliberate...to be named Puritanism, but associated with a certain conception of the American character that no one has illustrated more happily than Mr. James himself.... /I/t may be summed up...in the impression left by the volumes, as a whole, that the good and evil of the world, indifferent to the author as an artist, are not indifferent to him as a man.[3]

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[1] Murray's Magazine, X (Nov., 1891), 649-50.

[2] Ibid., pp. 641-2. [3] Ibid., p. 654.

Three other belletristic journals will round out the picture. None of these three mentioned Whitman, who was generally less attractive to the belletrists than was James. MacMillan's praised the craftsmanship of James's work, which had "trained English readers to take pleasure in more minute and delicate modes of presentation, in finer and soberer shades of thought, than the average English novelist knows how to reach,"[1] but it also found James's work "too fine, too French" for the English character; it imagined America, looking for salvation from French naturalism, crying out to James,

> Be a little less afraid of failure and extravagance. Stir, impress us, carry us away.... Be a little violent and take us by force.[2]

Sidney Waterlow, in an excellent article in the Independent Review, defended James's method as the proper method of psychological realism which sets out to probe the civilized mind and to analyze human motives. The method, said Waterlow, is artificial only to those who fail to see James's purpose. His style is necessarily complex because the reality it probes is complex.[3] Waterlow's article must have served well to prepare other reviewers for The Golden Bowl, which was published a few months later and which was surprisingly well received. Desmond MacCarthy,

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[1] MacMillan's Magazine, L (August, 1884), 253.

[2] Ibid., p. 254.

[3] Independent Review, IV (Nov., 1904), 236-43.

reviewing The American Scene in the Albany Review (which had merged with the Independent), made an interesting attempt to relate this book to the novels of James. The Americans, he pointed out, had to struggle to reach the amenities; he thought it significant that whatever of James's characters take a short-cut to beauty end up in disaster.[1]

It should be obvious that the scholarly and belletristic periodicals took to James more readily than to Whitman. This is particularly true after about 1890. The dream that Whitman offered the world was fading out, and the excessive claims and bad imitations of the Whitmanites were undoubtedly helping to scare away many intelligent readers. Meanwhile, the meaning and purpose and the implications of James's art were becoming clearer. His difficult and complex "major phase" novels were better received than his early novels; by the time the autobiographical A Small Boy and Others was off the press, at least a handful of significant critics was ready for it and eager for it. Two of the periodicals immediately seized upon a phrase out of James's autobiography[2] and used it as a description of his general method. James's phrase was, "the visiting mind."

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[1] Albany Review, I (April, 1907), 113.

[2] New Statesman, I (June 14, 1913), 315; Times Literary Supplement (April 10, 1913), 150.

VI.

We have noticed in various chapters that by the century's end the old surging liberal optimism had tamed down considerably. Almost parallel to this decline of passion for progress into a new and attainable world is a decline of interest in Whitman. If we set aside for the moment such complicating factors as the increased democratization of British culture (which would, of course, work against James), there is a third line that can be traced: a line that would portray a rise of serious interest in Henry James, especially among the younger generation of belletrists, beginning in the 1890's and rising steadily at precisely the time that James was most vulnerable to attack as being arty, difficult, and over-refined.

We have already taken notice of some of these younger critics: Ford Maddox Ford, for example, and Desmond MacCarthy. To mention two others, Joseph Conrad defended James as "the historian of fine consciences," and insisted that his restriction to fine consciences gave him greater, not less, range, for it is precisely range that is the distinguishing mark of a fine conscience;[1] and George Bernard Shaw, in some of his best maturing prose invective, defended James's play, Guy Domville, from the critics and from "these dunces" in the audience who had hissed so loudly that

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[1]Joseph Conrad, "Henry James: The Historian of Fine Consciences," in Dupee, The Question of Henry James, pp. 62-3.

the theater manager had come out on stage to apologize.[1] True, there were still plenty of people who would agree with Thomas Hardy that James had "a ponderously warm manner of saying nothing in infinite sentences";[2] there were many caustic comments, such as Wells's simile of a hippopotamus picking up a pea; there were parodies, such as Beerbohm's "The Moat in the Middle Distance" and some of the riotous Henry James sentences done for Punch by its gifted parodist editor, Sir Owen Seaman, such as,

> For, what lent a further complexity to the situation was that, even to suppose me arrived at the conclusion, effectively supported, that her motive for this so painfully truncated alliance was commendable, it still left her the liberty, accentuated by the conditions at which I have glanced, to misinterpret mine in congratulating her upon it.[3]

But the number of devoted defenders of James is more noteworthy.

In 1905, Elizabeth Carey came out with the first book-length treatment of James. Her book provided a clear, synthetic focus on James's work. She recognized (before James told the world so in his letters) that soaking in Europe was a kind of American patriotism, for the American horizon had to be enlarged. She recognized the valuable use that James could make of his plight.

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[1] Saturday Review, LXXIX (Jan. 12, 1895), 43-44.

[2] Quoted by Simon Noel-Smith, The Legend of the Master (London, 1947), p. 10.

[3] Owen Seaman, Borrowed Plumes (New York, 1902), pp. 169-70.

> Perhaps it is indeed necessary to belong to the disinherited in order to look on at the overwhelming complicated social spectacle of London with a gaze at once interested and detached.[1]

Rebecca West, too, devoted an early book to James. She echoed James himself on the shortcomings of being born an American:

> The essential thing about Mr. James was that he was an American; and that meant, for his type and generation, that he could never feel at home until he was in exile.[2]

> There was no blinking the fact that in attempting to set up in this unfurnished country Art was like a delicate lady who moves into a house before the plaster is dried on the walls; she was bound to lead an invalid existence.[3]

But although she admired James's work, she missed the fact that it was directly a product of those same "limitations," that James had turned his liabilities into assets. She could not accept the implications of James's orientation towards Europe and the past; it seemed to her a provincially American short-sightedness, a "strange illusion" that the past is preferable to the present. James, she suggested, lacked historical sense: he was unable to perceive that the present at <u>any</u> time is painful.[4] That James, or any American, should feel a need of Europe was to her understandable; but she had little sympathy for James's yearning for

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[1]Elizabeth Cary, <u>The Novels of Henry James</u> (London, 1905), p. 8.

[2]Rebecca West, <u>Henry James</u> (London, 1916), p. 9.

[3]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 10. [4]<u>Ibid</u>., pp. 26-7.

a "visitable past." Miss West's position was a kind of half-way house between the parties of memory and hope.

J. C. Squire, one of the Georgian poets, helped to construct the bridge between Victorian and twentieth century criticism of James. He defended James's obscurity as a necessary obscurity, an obscurity made necessary by the valid demands of the impressionist method. Writing in an age of vagueness and abstraction (surely this characteristic of the age gave Whitman an advantage in drawing out sympathetic vibrations), James, as an artist and as a man of vision, was driven to impressionistic techniques. It was

> the direct product of his passion for clarity. He detested the slipshod sentence which, compact as it may look as a piece of grammar, is a mere pot-shot as a piece of representation. He wanted to make no statement which did not embody precisely what he wanted to say.[1]

The most daring and ingenious of the young James critics at the turn of the century was Dixon Scott, Scott, who was killed in World War I, regarded James as

> certainly the greatest of all living artists (yes, painters and poets swept in) --at once the most profuse and precise, the most affluent and exquisite...[2]

While Scott's standard of judgment is essentially an aesthetic standard, he crossed over (as had Ford) into judging the place of

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[1] J. C. Squire, Books in General (London, 1919), p. 181.

[2] Dixon Scott, Men of Letters, ed. Sir Max Beerbohm (London, 1916), p. 78. (The original essays on James were published in The Bookman.)

James's novels in the modern world.

Scott playfully but enthusiastically claimed that he had found the figure in Henry James's carpet. It was simply humility; it was suggested by James's "simplicity, innocence, eagerness, honesty," by his "monkish love (above all) for things lowly and neglected...."[1] Nobody, Scott insisted, could be further from the meaning of James than Ford, with his idea that James's final message is one of despair. James was not lamenting the passing of a feudal world; he gave us instead, through his brilliant style, "the most 'universal'--the most republican--prose in our literature."

Scott well knew that this was contrary to James's reputation, which was for obscurity, subtlety, over-refinement, and snobbishness. But this misconception, he argued, was caused by an amazing trick played on James by his medium. To explain it called for a paradoxical simile: one must come to James's work as to a cathedral, realizing

> that it was a sweet affection for the earth that sent the whole edifice soaring, and that all this pomp and splendour is at heart a protest against pride.[2]

He went on to show that James's characters, like Searle in his first novel, The Passionate Pilgrim, are worn out by their fine perceptions of the commonplace while we, the readers, "get the

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[1] Men of Letters, p. 80.

[2] Ibid., p. 82.

grail."[1] James seems difficult only because of his richness and his great "hospitality" to shades of meaning. The shifts of focus and the adjustments serve merely to bring the eye closer to "the little universals, the things of daily life." His characters, all really martyrs, must pay a tragic price for the service they give us, "suffering for the sake of the world." They are bruised by the world, and "die that we may live more completely."[2]

But why, if James is the most republican of our prose writers, should he restrict himself to rare, finely cultivated characters? Scott's answer has more than cleverness to commend it: James had to restrict himself to sensitive, finely cultivated characters--because only uncommon eyes can perceive common things vividly. He had to use unusual, even abnormal people to capture with vivid exactness the sense of common things--ordinary things, as distinct from tomahawks and pirates and tigers. Thus, Scott concluded,

> In order to accomplish his democratic task he had to breed a class of rare aristocrats. In order to make his reader see and understand the excellence of the normal human scene he had to usher him into a recondite world of studios and salons and hushed leisure where the faculty of observation is cultivated like an orchid.[3]

The turn-of-the-century critics, with their insistence upon aesthetic quality and their interest in "technique" and their theories about the "necessity" of obscurity and difficulty in

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[1] Men of Letters, p. 84.

[2] Ibid., pp. 85-87. [3] Ibid., p. 89.

literature, are a long way out from their Victorian fathers. There were no great defenders of Whitman in their generation. But James was defended on more than aesthetic grounds, too; this is apparent in Ford, Scott, and Elizabeth Cary as well as in the periodicals. From the 1890's on, the implicit belief is that James's vision offers more than does Whitman's. The older liberals, dying off at the turn of the century along with the spirit that had animated their periodicals, could muster within themselves little more than nostalgia and confused regret--regret that the dream had not come true, or that the world insisted upon awakening them from it. The middle classes were apparently content with their complacency, and went on reading popular novels about virtue rewarded. The old conservatism was becoming emasculated, its periodicals drifting into the marketplace of middle-class morality--though a new conservatism was struggling to the surface, and was to have its fulfillment in the novels of Ford as well as in Hulme and Wyndham Lewis and T. S. Eliot. All these drifts and changes of mood were, of course, gradual; but they are reflected significantly in the belletristic and scholarly reactions to Whitman and James stretching from the Rossettis to Wilde, from Dowden and Symonds to Dixon Scott. Some coalescence of aesthetic theory and social realism and traditional philosophy was at work. And as James's reputation with the belletrists increased, Whitman's declined. Swinburne's rejection of Whitman and Stevenson's admiration for James are almost symbolic of what

happened. Aesthetic criticism cleared the air; but inevitably it passed over into social and philosophical criticism.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CONCLUSION

I.

The Victorian age was an age of flux, of transition. The three great revolutions of the preceding age--the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution--had torn up and modified beliefs and institutions which had been slowly changing ever since the Renaissance. Not just the face but the soul and body of western civilization were being rapidly altered. Something had been destroyed that was not yet replaced; the task of the Victorians, whether they liked it or not, was one of reconstruction. There was general agreement with William Morris's observation that "we not only are, but we feel ourselves to be living between the old and the new."

Although it is only recently that we have become aware of the magnitude of that dizzying sense of transition which the Victorians felt, it is very obviously there, present in the art and literature as well as in the political and social thought. And we should fully expect that it would be there. When men can feel the ground of civilization shifting under their feet, when they know that they live, as Arnold said, between two worlds, one dead and the other struggling to be born, they will inevitably scurry for solid ground. If they could not shut their eyes to the

instability, the vague, dizzy, uncertain lostness of their world, the Victorians had only two directions in which they could move. They could reach back for the old charts and maps or they could follow what they thought (or sometimes only hoped) was a Pillar of Fire guiding them to a promised land. They could try to rediscover the life-force that had held Western civilization together for nineteen hundred years, and hope to nurse it back to vitality, or they could reject the beliefs and institutions of the past as encumbrances and go in free, unshackled, adventurous quest of a New World, a new level of unrestrained human perfection. Carlyle, in Past and Present, went back to the middle ages, as did the Pre-Raphaelites; Arnold tried to revitalize and implement the classical humanist tradition; Browning steeped himself in the Italian Renaissance; Pater and the aesthetes grasped for the pulsating sensations of fleeting moments; Tennyson held tenaciously to his hesitant hopes for progress and the future; a good number of others, less doubt-ridden than Tennyson, shook off the past and marched confidently towards a free, manly, democratic utopia. But the point is, if they were cursed with reflective minds and a sense of purpose, they had to move in one direction or the other. They had either to follow the Pillar of Fire or to come to an understanding with their world and find their bearings in it.

This sense of disturbed orientation can be seen more clearly when we examine the Victorian reaction to American literature. At the same time the Victorians serve to amplify and enlighten the critical issues in American literature--issues which have since

become part of the complex of modern Western literature as a whole.

II.

The Victorians, driven by their need for bearings in a revolutionized world, had to take interest in what was going on in the cultural laboratory of democratic, middle-class America. Whether they sought a utopian pattern or stern warnings of doom, America, a freed extension of European liberalism, was an important focal point. "That cradle of the future," George Eliot called it; Matthew Arnold, cultural conservative to the core, agreed.

The general criticism of American culture, theoretical and usually detached from specific, practical analysis of pieces of American literature, gives us our first flash of insight into an unexplored area of the Victorian mind. At about mid-century, the general critics and scholars shifted noticeably from superior disdain to enthusiastic hope for American culture. Even Arnold was incapable of disdain; Mackay and Harriet Martineau and Lord Bryce were increasingly enthusiastic. The same shift can be detected in some of the more learned periodicals--even in the Tory Quarterly Review. If this growing confidence in the potentialities of democratic culture has no relationship to American cultural achievements, how can we account for it? Obviously, the orientation towards a New World was gaining momentum. Significantly, it grew most rapidly among the general critics and the

scholars; a number of Victorian scholars were attracted to Whitman (and none were attracted to the Europeanized James). We will come back to the point later, but is it not plausible that the general critics of culture and the scholars, by the nature of their work more aware of the mapless confusion of the age, flung themselves more readily into the hopeful optimism of "New World" orientation, simply because their need for some orientation was greater than the need felt by many of their contemporaries?

III.

The pattern of practical criticism of American literature is more complex. It does not follow the same line from disdain to hopefulness. But we can, in summary, notice a few identifiable patterns in the complex which give us a fuller understanding both of the Victorians and of the nature of American literature. A study of the reception of Whitman and James is especially revealing.

For these two do represent really opposite impulses in American culture. Whitman, like Thoreau, represents a literature and hence a civilization which "must walk towards Oregon, and not towards Europe." The "I" in Whitman's poems, the voyaging ego, the innocent Adam, the New Man, free of the forms and beliefs and institutions that have chained him in the dark and guilty European past, must make his glorious effort to discover and achieve the deification which nature intended for him. His isolation from Europe and the past is his most precious freedom. He will create

a New World, an organic society of free individuals who find perfection through individualism, affection, democracy, science, and optimism. He will create for and out of this Paradise a new literature which is likewise unregulated, organic, natural--a literature of the people and for the people. Henry James, on the other hand, rejecting "The American Dream" (which is also the European romantic dream), rejecting Emerson's party of Hope, is closer to the major writers who preceded him: Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville. The westward orientation, the vista of the frontier and the future, seemed to James too narrow; it excluded the major problem of American experience: the relationship of the New World to the Old. There was in James, too, a sense of evil--and if evil is real, Emerson and Whitman are untenable. James saw as clearly as did Whitman that American literature, like the world of the nineteenth century, had to take its bearings. James looked to the achievements and the rich complexity of Europe. The uniqueness of the American writer had to be his ability for detachment in probing and penetrating and understanding and communicating the meaning of Europe; he could be the complete European--something no Frenchman or Englishman or German could be. This to James was the great commission of the artist who was born as an American. It was a commission that demanded dedication and discipline and craftsmanship, and the first approach to it in fiction was the "international theme." The orientation of American civilization had to be eastward, back to the roots, deep into the tradition of Western civilization. The life and pulse could

be, and had to be, restored.

IV.

The response of the Victorians to Whitman reveals quite vividly the degree of disorientation in the latter half of the nineteenth century and at the same time puts an interpretation upon him of which we in the twentieth century are not always aware. Most of Whitman's friends and advocates in Britain were attracted to the hope and optimism of his dream. Whitman's acceptance, wrote William Clarke, depends on whether we accept the advent "of a new world; on whether we really believe that the old forms are exhausted." In a society of commonplaces and utility and confusion and disintegrating faiths, it was the vision of Whitman's free new world that first caught the attention. Here was the "pure clear voice" that James Bryce had said would come to expression in America. To a man, Whitman's British advocates were captured first by the bold vision of a new world of expansive human potentiality.

The point needs emphasis. Psychologically, the Victorians needed a frontier as badly as the Americans did. It was not just the off-beat radicals such as Carpenter and Buchanan who saw, respectively, "an era of unexampled glory" and at long last "the poetry of humanity newly dawning." Symonds, with all his polish of culture and education, was disheartened by the decay he saw everywhere; Whitman, he said, helped him to see "for the first time with sane eyes." Swinburne and Stevenson, who later

defected, were drawn first by the dreamlike optimism of a spiritual frontier. The aesthetes, advocates of pure form in the arts, contradicted their own critical standards to make room for the rough, natural, primitive lines of Whitman--again, because they needed the vision, the optimism. Although the thing that attracted men to Whitman usually at the same time attracted them to extreme political liberalism, the spell that Whitman cast could even in some case jump party lines: Powell, the Tory historian, was attracted by Whitman's convictions that progress is a natural law and that evil has no real existence; and the Quarterly gracefully shed its Toryism to support the claims of Whitman's "democratic" American literature over those of the "cultured" school. George Saintsbury stood almost alone in attacking Whitman's orientation while admiring the formal achievement of his poetry.

Most of Whitman's advocates, once they were drawn by the vision of a new orientation, raised only minor objections to the roughness of his work. Nor did they do much in the way of formal analysis and defense. Their interest was quite frankly didactic. Two such natural opposites as Edward Carpenter and Oscar Wilde could agree: in Whitman the form vanishes in the meaning.

The need for some sense of direction, then, is strongly revealed in the critics who accepted Whitman. We can take it a step further: in some cases a forced and strained liberalism is apparent. Both Saintsbury and W. M. Rossetti noticed some sham and artifice in Swinburne's republicanism, and noticed it before Swinburne exchanged coats, turned aristocrat, and attacked the

American poet whom he had once lavished with excessive praise. We can now see the same straining, the same leap into hopefulness, in others. Both Symonds and Dowden talked about Whitman's optimism not as truth, but as an antidote, a cure. Stevenson, Standish O'Grady, Powell, and Roden Noel seem moved by a similar impulse; convinced or not of the rectitude of Whitman's vision, they grasped at it as men will grasp at some rope, any rope, to pull themselves out of the sea.

The more intelligent of Whitman's detractors also had a firm grasp of the meaning and the implications of his new world and his new literature. Excluding the merely partisan Tories and the merely shocked middle classes, there were able critics who thought Whitman a dangerously ruthless and impractical prophet who might usher in the ruination of Western civilization. These men, too, were in search of cultural bearings; they sought them in an understanding and appropriation of Western traditions. Pater Bayne is the most articulate of these conservatives. He argued (as Mr. Eliot argued forty years later) that the literature of the Western world forms a whole, and that each piece of literature is in organic relationship to the whole and to all other pieces of literature. Whitman's democratic art, appealing to the masses and violating this organic relationship, could only cut the modern world further adrift--adrift in a dream-world in which it is pretended that evil does not exist. The Spectator's position was similar: Whitman's denial of evil was an idle romantic dream. It separated him not just from Europe (this would be justifiable)

but from reality. Other critics (Gosse and Leslie Stephen, for example, and even some of the radical periodicals) mistrusted the concept of a popular art in a wholly classless democratic society.

V.

In the British reception of James the problem of orientation is less clearly defined. Until almost the turn of the century the critics did more to obscure than to clarify James's place in American and in modern literature. Many of them either forgot that James was an American, or missed the themes of his novels and their carefully constructed points of view, or grumbled about immorality and excessive refinement. The indication is clear that the Victorians looked to American literature for a very different kind of uniqueness than the kind that James had to offer. America was facing west, and the Victorians generally assumed that all her writers did likewise. His early books, a good clue to his intentions as an American writer, were often left out of the picture. The Victorians did not often see, until the 1890's, that James was a spokesman for an alternate cultural orientation, an orientation which had a good deal in common with the thought of Matthew Arnold and yet one which could probe in a new way the meaning of Europe.

In studying the reception of James we can again see the extent to which many Victorians were looking hopefully to the West and the future. James seemed to many of them a kind of snobbish traitor, a man born free at the edge of a frontier who turned his

back on the glowing future and walked deliberately into the enslavement of a sickly, demoralized, pampered, artificial world--the very world that they themselves were trying to leave behind. The radicals either scorned him or ignored him.

But James did not fare very well anywhere on the British political spectrum for at least twenty years. The conservatives did not recognize him as a spokesman, partly because they did not understand him, partly because his refinements and subtleties seemed detached from "real life," and partly because they too expected something more uniquely American. They attacked his "pessimism" and his "artiness" as vigorously as such radicals as H. G. Wells and Robert Buchanan did.

In the 'nineties, however, a handful of careful, essentially belletristic articles on James cleared the way for an understanding of his meaning and its implications. The difficult and complex novels of James's "major phase" were better received than his earlier novels. As the twentieth century opened, the nature of James's "dispatriation" was becoming clear. The orientation towards which James had been pressing was finally visible, and could finally be discussed as a meaningful alternative for American and for modern European literature.

James's rise at the end of the century is interesting. At this point we must again pick up Whitman, look at both writers, and take hold of two important questions: (1) Does the reception given Whitman and James show any significant trends or characteristics moving through or underneath the Victorian age as the

Victorians sought their own orientation? (2) Do the Victorian reactions to American literature shed any light on twentieth-century literature?

VI.

From 1856 to 1892 there is no definite, remarkable shift pro or con in the British attitude towards Whitman. There is in this same period, we have noticed, a growing confidence among general cultural critics in the strength and potential of American culture and literature. Whitman was apparently a very insignificant factor. Most general critics ignored him while his literary reputation ran at even keel.

But there is in the 1890's a very definite change in the mood of the Victorian mind. Perhaps it is only that mood long ago denominated fin de siecle. It is a mood of growing hopelessness and despair. There are extremely interesting overtones of it among the liberals and radicals, the dreamers, the writers and critics and thinkers who had turned to the west and the future and the hope of a new Adam in a new Paradise. For many of them something had gone wrong. Directly or indirectly, Whitman was involved.

The fading of Swinburne's enthusiasm for Whitman and for Whitman's prophecy of the art and life to come may be as prophetic as Swinburne once thought Whitman was. Gloom set in in many unexpected places. Between 1876 and 1892, Gosse became completely disenchanted with Whitman and democratic culture.

Buchanan saw a new dawn in the 1860's; in the 1880's he sneered at James, a dandy who was ruined by culture and pessimism and would have "no place in modern literature." But in 1899 Buchanan resigned himself to the vague hope that the world might prove after all to be a fairyland. "The Dream of perfection," he announced, "is over." James, who had "no place in modern literature," was just catching the attention of serious young critics. The Westminster Review reflected the same mood in the same year. Hesitantly and sadly the Westminster let Whitman go, observing that his denial of evil made his vision seductive but untenable. The article is almost a tired and disillusioned sigh. "If only America were all that he sings!" The dream of perfection which had sustained the Westminster for eighty years was hanging by a thread in 1899. Fourteen years later the magazine died. Edward Dowden, who had always been hesitant about Whitman's orientation but had let his need of it overpower his scholar's instincts, confessed in old age that he had been too reckless. The Quarterly, bereft of its Tory stamp, broke its paradoxical tradition of support for "the democratic school" in American literature and published an important article by Morton Fullerton which attacked the drift towards mass culture and brilliantly advanced the cause of Henry James. Stevenson, once strongly attracted to the vigor and freedom and vital optimism of Whitman, had already in the 'eighties given himself up to the practice of the brittle, hard craftsmanship that his own deepening vision demanded of him. A few years into the twentieth century, with the air cleared by

belletristic critics, Ford Maddox Ford and Rebecca West and Dixon Scott explained the importance of Henry James to modern literature. At the end of one confused era and the beginning of another, quite independent of any parallel political shifts, a significant shift in the literary world had taken place. Whitman's vision had failed to hold its charm.

There are other less significant conclusions about the thinking and feeling of the Victorians that can be drawn from this study. They should be set down briefly. For one thing, the idea of class and tradition was not just a Tory idea. Matthew Arnold is not the only proof of the statement. There is W. E. H. Lecky. There is the Whig Edinburgh Review and the liberal London and Westminster reviews. These liberals and more stood in fear of a world stripped of classes and traditions. Many others (Stevenson in his youth, Dowden, and even Symonds) swallowed their fears with something less than conviction. Again some cases of strained, forced, artificial liberalism seem to suggest themselves. This may help to explain why the dream of perfection vanished so quickly from so many at century's end.

Secondly, we should notice an odd fact: Whitman, who regarded himself as a democratic bard, a people's poet, got the attention of quite a few scholars and professors; James, a writer of refined sensibilities and intellect, got the attention of none. This too would seem to indicate something about the compelling magnetic strength of the new orientation that Whitman offered the world. The scholars felt more desperately than others the

uncertainties of the age. They had a commensurately greater need for a way out, a hope. They looked to America, not just for an interesting body of literature upon which they could operate, but for hope. James could only bring them closer to a world they wished to reject.

A final point about the Victorians: the didacticism of their criticism blinded them not only to Henry James (before the 'nineties, at least) but also to the real worth of Whitman's poetry. They wrote almost nothing worth reading today about Whitman's poetic achievement. The choice was a simple one: damn him as a barbarian or praise him in superlatives which could slip easily and vaguely into praise of his content. The only variation was the frequent mild apology for his formlessness--almost as though it did not really matter. The aesthetes, who meant to counteract the strong didacticism of the age and deal with pure form--apart, even, from nature, which was inferior--trapped themselves into confusion and contradiction. Affinity of spirit, not pure form, attracted them to Whitman, Their own critical grounds could never justify the choice.

VII.

We are left with our final question: What connection can be established between these two contending literary movements and the Victorian attitudes they uncover, on the one hand, and on the other the modern literature which grew out of or displaced them? The full answer to that question would doubtless have many parts.

But the principle and most interesting part is this: the formal movement in contemporary literature towards sparsity and hardness and economy, and the thematic movement towards purposelessness and guilt and the need for redemption, have very clear origins in the Victorian inheritance.

There had been plenty of noisy predictions of what modern literature would be like. Overwhelmingly the Victorians looked to America for a portent. Even those who detested what they saw, saw in Whitman and in the regionalist fiction writers the sign of the times. But they were overwhelmingly wrong. Carpenter, who predicted that Whitman would be "read and lovingly absorbed by the millions as time goes on," was almost as far off as were Whitman and Tolstoy, who predicted the same kind fate for Carpenter. Only a few daring young belletrists at the turn of the century, among them Conrad and Ford, ventured to suggest that there was something worth considering in that <u>other</u> stream of American literature, with its techniques of analysis and exploration, its careful weaving, its refinement, and its artistic discipline.

The majority of Victorians who looked to America and made their predictions were wrong. The heritage left to young men growing up in the early 1900's was a heritage of shock and disruption, of exploded myths and shattered dreams. The better the dream, the harder the awakening. The Victorian dream of perfection, spun as a soft protection against the hard facts of a world that had lost its bearings and needed a faith, suddenly vanished. "The Dream of perfection is over." We can see more and more

clearly a rupture between the Victorians and ourselves. The rupture was pronounced necessary and good and final by T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, T. S. Eliot, and others. (Significantly, two of these four are expatriate Americans.) Our literature reflects with increasing unanimity an altered attitude. The major intellectual activity of our time, one critic has summarized, "has been that of becoming disencumbered of the gigantic inheritance of the Victorians." In Whitman's time, Mr. Eliot has said, "it was possible to hold to certain notions, and many illusions, which are now untenable." Contemporary American poetry, comments Mr. Delamore Schwartz, is a protest against "the forced smiles (and the whistling in the dark) of dogmatic optimism."

But the new things that began happening to our literature in about 1912--a new classicism, a pronounced respect for political conservatism, a revaluation of liberal and humanist post-Renaissance thought, a sense of evil as a metaphysical reality, and in many cases a return to the orthodox Christian tradition--had been planted in the Victorian age. Contemporary writers, though they usually cast back only to Hopkins or to the seventeenth century, had their fore-runners, writers and critics who sensed the illusory character of the transcendentalist impulse, in the nineteenth century.

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Materials in periodicals have been listed by author (when known) or by title (when the author is not known) only in the case of articles. Book reviews and parts of articles have not been listed by author or title. Thus the entries beginning with the name of the periodical are meant to suggest reviews or parts of articles.

The bibliography has been divided into six sections, as follows: I--American Literature and Its Orientation; II--General Works: The Victorians and American Literature; III--The Victorians and Walt Whitman: Books; IV--The Victorians and Walt Whitman: Articles and Reviews; V--The Victorians and Henry James: Books; VI--The Victorians and Henry James: Articles and Reviews.

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